



Tackling the Opioid Epidemic

WHEREAS, The epidemic of overdoses and deaths from the abuse of prescription painkillers, heroin and fentanyl has devastated countless families and communities. The crisis is not limited by demographic, economic, or geographic factors and affects individuals of every age, race, and gender. Opioids now kill more Americans than gun violence or automobile accidents; and

WHEREAS, Addiction is a serious public health issue. While experts understand that addiction is a disease, many in the general public continue to view addiction as a moral failure. Stigma associated with opioid use and treatment can cause patients to forgo life-saving medical services or withdraw from treatment. Additionally, opioid abuse has led to a surge in Hepatitis C and other diseases transmitted through the reuse of hypodermic needles; and

WHEREAS, According to a 2016 Surgeon General report, just 10 percent of Americans with a drug use disorder obtain specialty treatment. The report attributed the low rate to severe shortages in the supply of care, with some areas of the country lacking affordable options for treatment, leading to waiting periods of weeks, months or no treatment at all; and

WHEREAS, The answer is not to revive the failed policies of prior wars on drugs, including mandatory sentencing and criminalization, which only serve to exacerbate racial and economic inequities and divert resources needed for prevention and treatment; and

WHEREAS, The proliferation of prescription painkillers is the root of the current drug crisis and one that policymakers must address. Beginning in the 1990's, drug companies flooded local markets with opioid painkillers, marketing them as safe and effective while knowing they were highly addictive. From 1999 to 2016, opioid-related overdose deaths increased by more than 800 percent. Nearly half of these opioid-related deaths involved a prescription opioid, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and

WHEREAS, The rate of fatal opioid-related overdose was highest among workers employed in industries and physically demanding occupations known to have high rates of work-related injuries and illnesses. This is consistent with research documenting the common use of prescribed opioids for management of acute and chronic pain following work-related injury. The rate was also higher among workers in occupations with lower rates of paid sick leave and less job security.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The UWUA recognizes that there is no single, simple solution to the opioid crisis. Opioid abuse is a national epidemic that warrants swift and immediate action and significant resources; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the UWUA encourages government at every level to increase treatment options for all those afflicted by the disease of addiction. The UWUA supports the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency (CARE) Act sponsored by Senator Warren and Representative Cummings. The bill authorizes \$100 billion over 10 years to combat drug addiction, funneling money to cities, counties, and states — particularly those hardest hit by drug overdoses — and other organizations to boost spending on addiction treatment, harm reduction services, and prevention programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, We must educate others and ourselves on the basic realities of addiction and why it requires our attention. Addiction destroys lives. It is not a choice and is beyond an individual's control. While preventing new generations of opioid misuse, it is critical that we expand access to the opioid overdose antidote naloxone and the training of healthcare staff as well as providing treatment options for the uninsured and underinsured; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, We must make addiction treatment easier to access than opioid painkillers and heroin. The UWUA advocates for the expansion of drug courts and similar alternatives to help drug offenders get treatment and avoid prison time; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, The UWUA supports shareholder resolutions aimed at holding pharmaceutical executives accountable for potential legal and regulatory actions faced by corporations for their role in fanning the nation's opioid epidemic. UWUA also supports the actions of the hundreds of states, counties and cities across the country that have brought litigation against the manufacturers and distributors of opioid pain medications; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, We know that the vast majority of occupational injuries can be prevented. UWUA safety committees have a critical role to play in preventing potential prescription opioid addiction. Stopping workplace injuries from happening in the first place is obviously the best possible solution.