



general fund.

## **SIGNIFICANT ISSUES**

According to the Department of Health, New Mexico ranked 16th highest for drug overdose death rate in 2018 and ranked 12th in 2019. While New Mexico has done a great deal to combat the rise of opioid overdose deaths, rates have not been significantly reduced. Based on a 2017 study, DOH estimates as many as 22 thousand individuals in New Mexico inject heroin. Though difficult to estimate, 30 percent of this population may not respond positively to existing oral treatments available to individuals who use heroin.

Nationally, the US Health and Human Services Department has identified expanding access to treatment for opioid use disorder as an important strategy for reducing opioid morbidity and mortality. In general, harm-reduction strategies remain controversial despite evidence these interventions may be more pragmatic and effective compared with existing treatments.

Other countries, including Canada and England, have utilized a variety of injectable pharmacotherapies - including diacetylmorphine [pharmaceutical grade heroin] and hydromorphone - to treat this population with encouraging outcomes. A recent review published by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, May 2020, shows statistically significant greater retention in treatment, reduction in illicit drug use, reduction in criminal activities, and fewer convictions. The study further found that injectable opioid treatment provided more benefits than methadone treatment, and at lower cost for individuals who had previously used other treatment options.

Over a two-year period, this demonstration project would evaluate the safety, feasibility, and efficacy of injectable opioid treatment for patients with opioid use disorders. This appropriation would fund the first year of a possible multi-year research project that would allow the department of psychiatric addictions to obtain necessary regulatory approvals, provide community education, develop a full protocol that would meet all regulatory requirements, as well as to collaborate with, and learn from, other places that already are doing injectable pharmacotherapy.

This initiative would be housed in, and aligns with, the mission of UNM Health System's Addiction and Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) which specializes in providing diverse proven substance abuse and mental health treatment, including specialized services for women. ASAP provides services to adults and adolescents with a primary substance abuse diagnosis and to individuals who have a substance use disorder along with other mental health issues.

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