



Ghostwriting Op Ed: Opioid Settlements: Investing in a Real Solution

Last week, Illinois took a step in the right direction, when our state joined others in filing suit against pharmaceutical companies, holding them accountable for their role in this national crisis. Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul's charges allege that several manufacturers spent millions to increase opioid use, deceptively convincing healthcare providers and patients that the drugs were effective, and making false benefit claims.

These state lawsuits are important for several reasons. One, they aim to prohibit future unfair and deceptive conduct by these drug companies. Two, they hold companies accountable for their role in what has become a devastating national crisis. And three, if and when these companies pay the consequence for their involvement more people will get the treatment they desperately need. At least, we hope they will.

Today, drug overdoses claim the lives of more Americans under the age of 50 than any other cause. In Illinois, opioids killed nearly 11,000 residents since 2008. According to the state Department of Health, "The opioid epidemic is the most significant public health and public safety crisis facing Illinois."

As CEO of abc organization, I witness the scourge of this epidemic first-hand.

We work with individuals dependent on prescription opioids and comfort families who lost loved ones to overdose. With more than x years assisting over a million people for their substance use disorders, abc organization knows that thoughtfully tailored prevention and treatment programs foster success and can reverse the tide of addiction.

But initiatives like these cannot save lives if they are not funded.

The timing of Illinois' lawsuit coincides with a tentative, multi-state settlement by Purdue Pharma (makers of OxyContin). Purdue Pharma conceded to pay Oklahoma \$270 million rather than go to trial. Most of these funds are now earmarked towards a national center for addiction treatment and research, with amounts allocated to address Oklahoma's opioid epidemic.

As Illinois prepares for the possibility of its own multimillion-dollar settlement or verdict, it is imperative that lawmakers act conscientiously and strategically when these funds arrive.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control estimates that prescription opioids cost our country \$78 Billion a year in medical care, addiction treatment, productivity loss, and legal fees. It is essential that any funds recouped from pharmaceutical opioid lawsuits are invested to reduce, treat, and prevent future opioid dependency.

Illinois must learn from its 1990s mistake when the vast majority of a \$350 million tobacco settlement supported tax rebates instead of smoking cessation, treatment, and education programs that would help rectify the damage caused by the tobacco industry.

If nothing changes, the opioid epidemic is expected to take 2,700 more Illinois lives next year.

This crisis is far from over. Illinois communities are desperate for relief—programs to change what has become an unparalleled health crisis. If Illinois is successful in receiving settlement funds, dollars must be clearly earmarked for opioid dependency prevention and treatment programs