

Pennsylvania’s Heroin/Opioid Crisis: Resident Attitudes and the Role of State Government

July 2017

Introduction

As part of its continuing examination of the heroin/opioid crisis, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania contracted with the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg to include two questions in its Spring 2017 Penn State Poll.

The questions in the poll asked adult respondents (age 18 and older) to identify the main causes of the heroin/opioid crisis and the role of state government in addressing it. Respondents were asked to select only one answer from a select set of responses for each question.

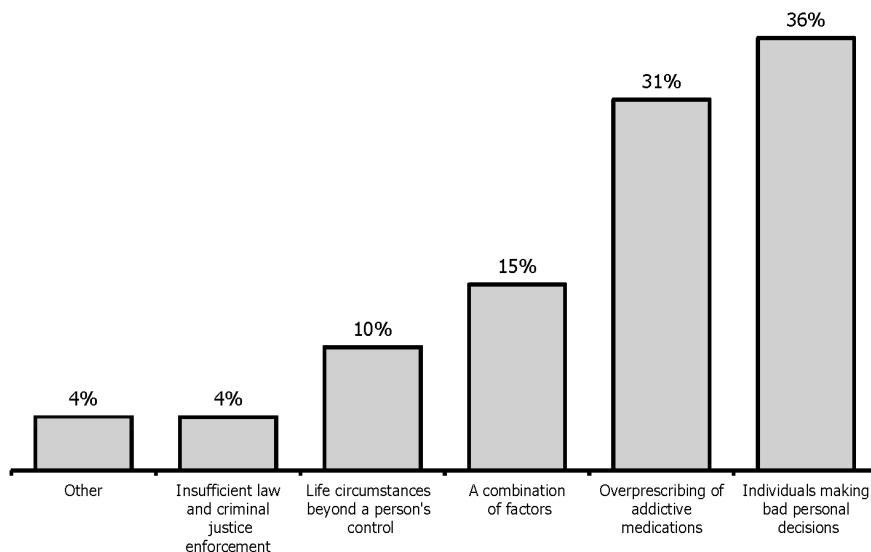
The survey was conducted by the Center for Survey Research between March 8 and April 18, 2017. A total of 609 respondents completed the survey, which was conducted via landlines and cell phones throughout Pennsylvania. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

After the survey was completed, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania applied its definition of rural and urban counties to identify survey respondents as either rural or urban, according to the county in which they lived.

Main Causes of Pennsylvania’s Heroin/Opioid Crisis

A plurality of survey respondents indicated that individuals making bad personal decisions (36 percent) and the overprescribing of addictive medication (31 percent) were causes of the crisis.

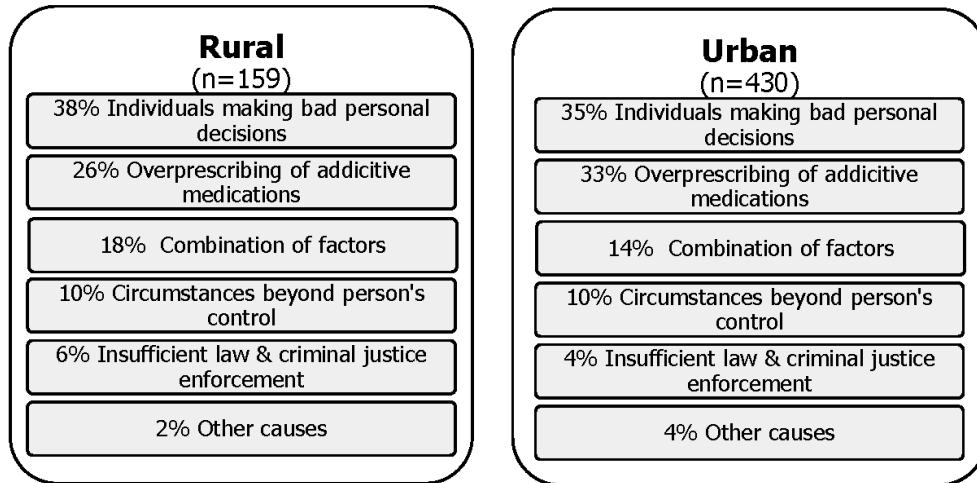
Main Causes of the Heroin/Opioid Crisis, 2017 (n=589)



Note: Graph totals may not add to 100% due to rounding. All graphs exclude “don’t know” and “decline to answer” responses. For questions on the main cause of the crisis, the “other” category included: lack of family support/bad parenting; economic causes; lack of education about the effects of heroin/opioids; availability/access and cheap cost; lack of mental health care resources; and lack of religion/values. Data source for all graphs: April 2017 Penn State Poll.

The survey results indicated no significant differences in the answers between rural and urban respondents on the main causes of the crisis.

Main Cause of Heroin/Opioid Crisis, by Rural/Urban Respondents, 2017



Main Cause of Heroin/Opioid Addiction Crisis, by Age, 2017

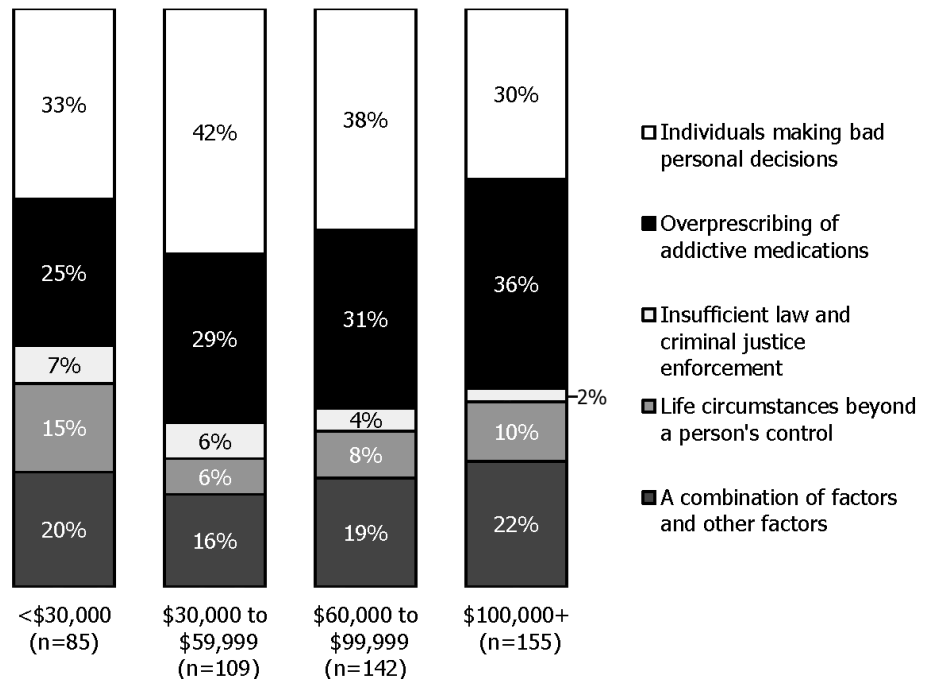
	<35 Years Old (N=166)	35 to 64 Years Old (n=297)	65+ Years Old (n=126)
Making bad decisions	34%	35%	41%
Overprescribing of addictive medications	30%	32%	29%
Insufficient law enforcement	0%	5%	9%
Life circumstance beyond control	14%	9%	6%
Combination of factors	17%	16%	12%
Other	6%	3%	3%

There were significant differences among respondents according to age in how they viewed the main causes of the heroin/opioid crisis.

Main Causes of Heroin/Opioid Crisis, by Income, 2017

Regardless of income, most respondents pointed to two factors as the main causes of the crisis: individuals making bad personal decisions and the overprescribing of addictive medications.

There were no significant differences in responses about the main causes of the heroin/opioid crisis after controlling for gender, race/ethnicity, or educational attainment.



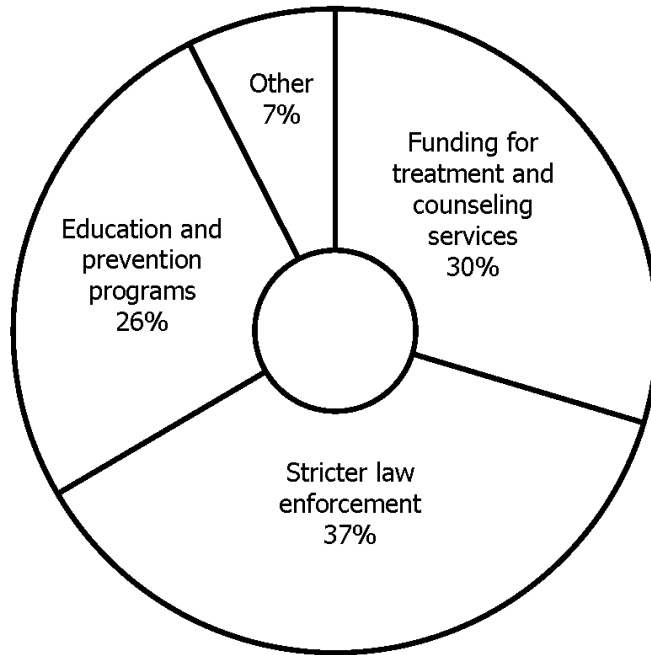
State Government’s Role in Addressing the Crisis

The overwhelming majority of respondents (99 percent) indicated that state government has a role in addressing the heroin/opioid epidemic.

The role that state government should play, however, was not as clear cut. Thirty-seven percent of respondents said the focus of state government should be stricter law enforcement for those selling or dealing drugs, 30 percent said it should be funding appropriate treatment and counseling services, and 26 percent said it should be providing age-appropriate education and prevention programs.

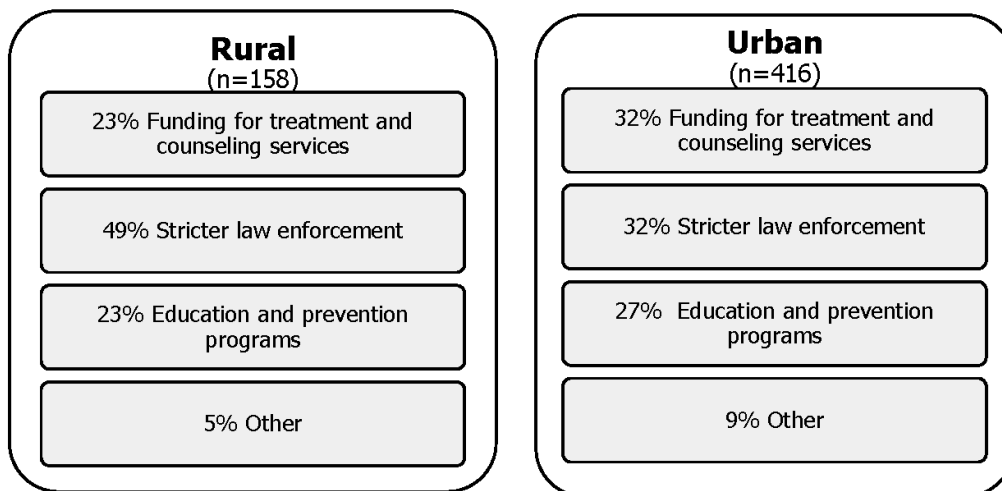
Of the remaining 7 percent, 4 percent said the state should provide better regulations in terms of doctors, prescriptions and the pharmaceutical industry, 2 percent said a combination of strategies, and the remaining 1 percent suggested economic development and the legalization of drugs.

State Government’s Role in Addressing Heroin/Opioid Crisis, 2017 (n=574)



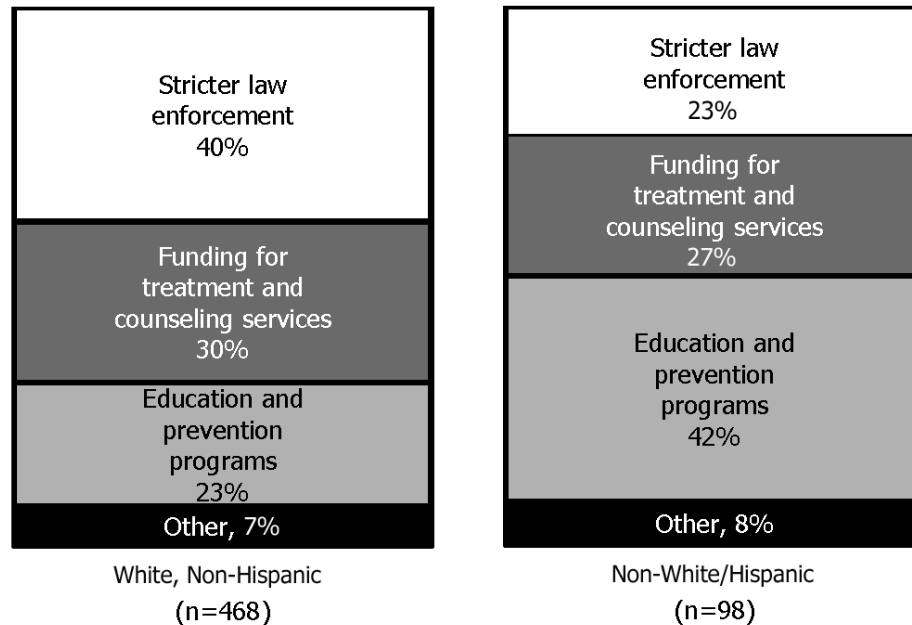
Among rural respondents who said that the heroin/opioid crisis was a priority for state government, 49 percent said stricter law enforcement should be the main focus. Among urban respondents who said that the heroin/opioid crisis was a priority for state government, 32 percent said stricter law enforcement and another 32 percent said funding for treatment and counseling services should be the main focus.

State Government’s Role in Heroin/Opioid Crisis, by Rural/Urban Respondents, 2017



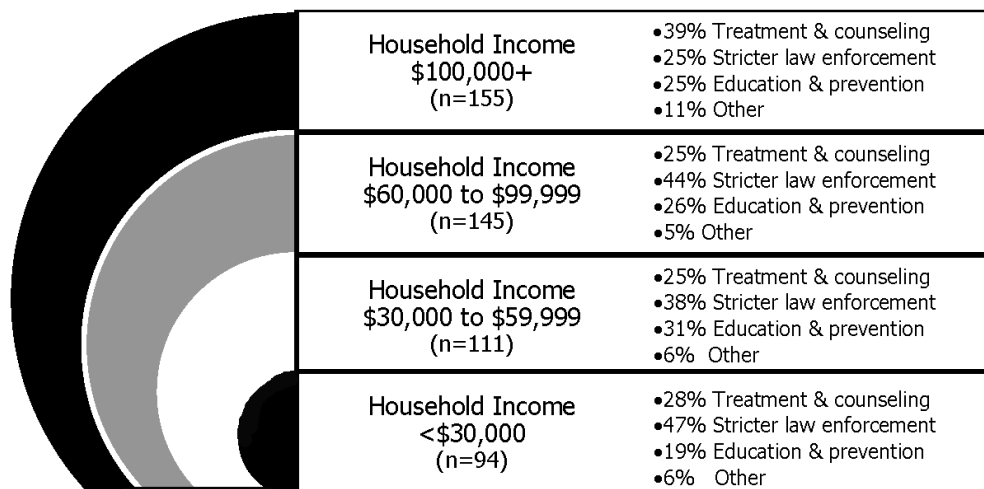
There were diverging views on what the focus of state government should be according to race/ethnicity. More nonwhite and/or Hispanic respondents (42 percent) than white, non-Hispanic respondents (about 23 percent) said education and prevention programs should be the focus. Conversely, more white, non-Hispanic respondents (40 percent) than nonwhite and/or Hispanic respondents (23 percent) said stricter law enforcement should be the focus.

State Government’s Role in Heroin/Opioid Crisis, by Race/Ethnicity, 2017



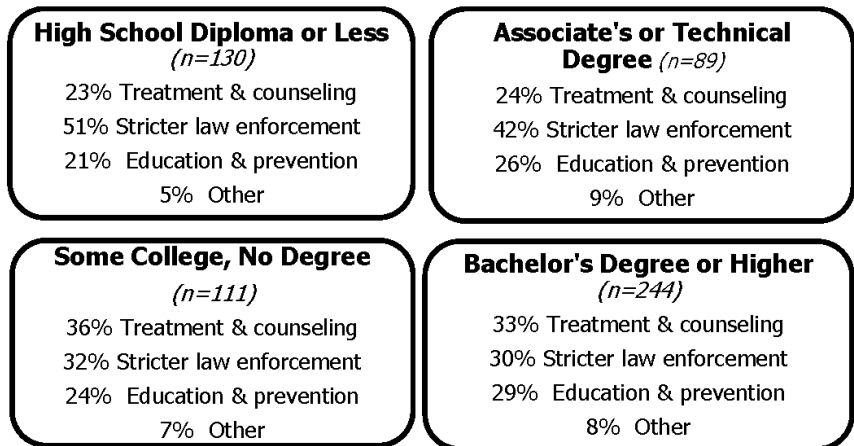
Income seemed to be a significant factor in respondents’ opinions on the role of state government in dealing with the heroin/opioid crisis. Respondents with household incomes under \$100,000 supported stricter law enforcement (43 percent) while respondents with household incomes of \$100,000 and more supported treatment and counseling programs (39 percent).

State Government’s Role in Heroin/Opioid Crisis, by Household Income, 2017



State Government's Role in the Heroin/Opioid Crisis, by Educational Attainment, 2017

The focus of state government in addressing the crisis also varied according to the respondents' educational attainment: 51 percent of respondents with a high school diploma or less said stricter law enforcement should be the focus while 30 percent of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher said the same.



Main Causes of the Heroin/Opioid Crisis and State Government Response, 2017



How respondents identified the main causes of the heroin/opioid crisis seemed to influence their views on how state government should deal with it. For example, among those who saw the crisis as being caused by insufficient law and criminal justice enforcement, 88 percent said that stricter law enforcement was needed. Similarly, among those who saw the crisis being caused by the overprescribing of addictive medications, 36 percent said there should be funding for treatment and counseling services.

Conclusions

No single cause identified

Respondents identified a number of potential reasons for the heroin/opioid crisis. Some pointed to personal failures, others said it was the overprescribing of medications, and still others said it was the lack of law enforcement. The lack of a consensus around a single cause may mean that respondents are still learning about the crisis and are still forming their opinions about it. It could also suggest that respondents' experiences with the crisis vary and they see many causes surrounding the crisis.

No consensus on the cause of the crisis by gender, race/ethnicity, age, income

There were no significant differences among the responses to identify the main causes of the heroin/opioid crisis according to the various demographic and income groups.

Solid agreement that state government has a role in addressing the crisis

According to the survey results, 99 percent of respondents agreed that state government has a role in addressing the crisis.

Splinter agreement as to what state government's role should be

While there was nearly universal agreement that state government should do something, there was no universal agreement as to what that something should be.

Different demographic groups each had different solutions

Rural respondents tended to say that state government should focus on law enforcement while urban respondents tended to point to funding for treatment. There were similar splits in opinion on the response of state government based on respondents' age, income, race, and educational attainment.

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