

Educating Together, Improving Together

Harmonizing Interprofessional Approaches
to Address the Opioid Epidemic

A Special Publication of the National Academy of Medicine



Using Data to Identify Actionable Priorities

The United States is in the midst of an urgent and complex opioid crisis. A coordinated response requires identifying and addressing professional practice gaps (PPGs) related to pain management, opioid use disorder (OUD), and other substance use disorder (SUD) care, as well as integrating evidence-based best practices into health professional education and training curricula across the continuum from undergraduate training into post-graduate continuing education. This Special Publication presents two information-gathering efforts to assess persisting PPGs pertaining to pain management and SUD care and to better understand the current health professional education environment: the first is a comprehensive literature review, and the second is a survey of the regulatory landscape.

The results underscore the need to collaboratively develop a harmonized interprofessional, person- and family-centered approach for the continuum of health professions education to more effectively address the opioid crisis. Optimizing practice, regulation, and education has continued to be a challenge for educational systems and stakeholders looking to prepare and support students, trainees, and professions for the complexities of the field.

This Special Publication describes key action-oriented priorities to support the goal identified above which aims to navigate substantial complexity by identifying unwarranted (or unproductive) variation, finding opportunities to innovate around shared goals, and working methodically to reduce redundancy and burden. Harmonization is a common theme embedded throughout these priorities to support interprofessional collaboration and alignment. Furthermore, the key priorities may also provide opportunities to marshal analogous strategies and actions in a broader context to address other complex public health challenges.

Priority 1: Advance Minimum Core Competencies

- Establish minimum core competencies in pain management and SUDs for all health care professionals, and support tracking of health care professionals' competence.
- Address skills necessary for effective interprofessional collaboration and continuous learning and improvement through minimum core competencies.
- Implement competencies which describe the knowledge, skills, and attitudinal expectations across health professions and disseminate to educational systems and stakeholders.
- Enable national tracking of health care professionals' achievement of competencies through collaboration between all stakeholders.

Priority 2: Enhance Alignment Across Accreditors

- Align accreditors' expectations for interprofessional collaboration in education for pain management and SUDs.
- Convene national health professional accreditors in continuing education to reduce unwarranted variation and create a supportive learning environment.
- Strengthen data monitoring efforts by leveraging collaborations between continuing education accreditors who support data collection across professions.

Priority 3: Foster Interprofessional Collaboration

- Foster interprofessional collaboration among licensing and certifying bodies to optimize regulatory approaches and outcomes.
- Recognize that interprofessional care is essential to manage both pain management and SUDs.
- Reframe regulatory accountability for individual professions and interprofessional teams.
- Establish a national task force to study existing variations in state-level regulations and seek opportunities to harmonize policies.
- Advance interprofessional practice by supporting programmatic activities through assessment, curricula, and quality measures.

Priority 4: Invest in Continuing Education

- Unleash the capacity for continuing education to meet health profession learners where they are through investment and leadership.
- Individualize education and adhere to accreditation requirements grounded in improvement science and learning best practices instead of mandates that limit educational flexibility.
- Catalyze desired educational outcomes by pursuing strategies to increase support of accredited continuing education providers.
- Develop federal and/or state level funding and support to advance continuing education impact.
- Integrate accredited continuing education into a broader system-based workforce to remove silos between health professionals.

Priority 5: Harmonize Practice Improvement Initiatives

- Collaborate to harmonize practice improvement initiatives between organizational stakeholders.
- Expand the reach and impact of statutory initiatives by exploring opportunities for innovation and collaboration between regulatory agencies.
- Fund the development of competency-based educational modules on pain management and SUDs
- Pursue high-impact opportunities to harmonize practice improvement such as:
 - allowing any accredited CE provider to deliver education for opioid use disorder training,
 - funding competency-based educational modules, and
 - developing mechanisms to measure, monitor, and modify workforce education and practices change processes.

**Download the publication at:
nam.edu/educating-improving-together**



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

Note: The special publication described has undergone peer review according to procedures established by the National Academy of Medicine (NAM). Publication by the NAM signifies that it is the product of a carefully considered process and is a contribution worthy of public attention, but does not constitute endorsement of conclusions and recommendations by the NAM. The views presented in this publication are those of the authors and do not represent formal consensus positions of the authors' organizations, the NAM, or the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.