Vermont Legislators’ Opinions Regarding the Opioid Epidemic
Casandra Nowicki1, Emily Eichner1, Liam du Preez1, Jonathan Gau1, Matthew Lebow1, Bridget Moore1
Ryan Harned1, Elizabeth Cote2, Charles D. MacLean MD1, Jan K. Carney MD1
1Robert Larner, M.D. College of Medicine, 2Area Health Education Centers Program

Introduction
- The VT General Assembly includes 180 legislators: 150 representatives and 30 senators
- State legislators have substantial power to create opioid-related policies
- During the 2017-18 VT legislative session 22 opioid-related bills were introduced and 9 were passed
- No data currently exist on how VT legislators gather information and formulate public health decisions regarding opioid policies

Purpose
- Examine VT legislators’ understanding of the opioid epidemic
- Identify what drives legislators to draft legislation, including beliefs, priorities, and voting decisions
- Inform health and human services professionals to best respond to legislators’ knowledge gaps and continuing education needs

Methods
- Design: 68-item web-based survey, including both closed and open-ended questions
- Population: 176 legislators of the 2018 VT General Assembly; 22% response rate, from 12 of 14 counties
- Analysis: REDCap and STATA

Results

- 89% of legislators felt they have access to high quality information regarding the opioid crisis
- 90% of legislators were familiar or very familiar with the 2017 opioid prescribing rules

VT’s new opioid prescribing policies...

- Were Necessary
- Improve Health
- Save Money

Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

How effective are VT’s programs?
- Most Effective
  - Expanded Access to Treatment
  - Prescriber Education
  - Prescriber Rules

How well funded are VT’s programs?
- Least Effective
  - Youth Education/Prevention
  - Prison Treatment Access
  - Services for Released Prisoners

Most Effective

Very Effective  Effective  Ineffective

Least Effective

Most Effective

Very Effective  Effective  Ineffective

Conclusions & Implications
- Future investments should be directed toward youth education, support programs for those in recovery, and improve treatment for those in the criminal justice system
- Direct engagement is the preferred approach to inform legislators about public health efforts
- More research is necessary on how to enact youth and public education programs and on the role of law enforcement in addressing the opioid crisis

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

Discussion
- Legislators agree that:
  - investment saves money and improves health (in particular: access to treatment, prescriber education, and prescribing rules)
  - need increased funding for social services, prevention, and treatment for people in the criminal justice system
- Mixed opinions regarding:
  - effectiveness of public education measures
  - role of law enforcement in addressing crisis
- Information:
  - top sources are those commonly available in the statehouse
  - online resources were ranked the most difficult sources to use
  - What is the potential role of universities as a reliable source of information for legislators?
- Limitations:
  - low response rate may introduce bias and limit generalizability

Respondent Characteristics, N=39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age, median (range)</th>
<th>68 (54-78)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex, % male</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prog</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service, years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 yr</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 yr</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12 yr</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13+ yr</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note possible overlap between Testimony and Advocate/Lobbyists