

Advising the Congress on Medicare issues

Potentially inappropriate opioid use in Medicare Part D

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What are opioids?

- A class of narcotic medications used to manage and relieve pain
 - Naturally occurring (e.g., morphine)
 - Semi-synthetic (e.g., oxycodone and hydrocodone)
- Schedule II (most restrictive) under DEA classification for controlled substances
- Addictive properties with a high risk for overuse and/or abuse
- No FDA maximum dose

Concerns about use of opioids by Medicare beneficiaries

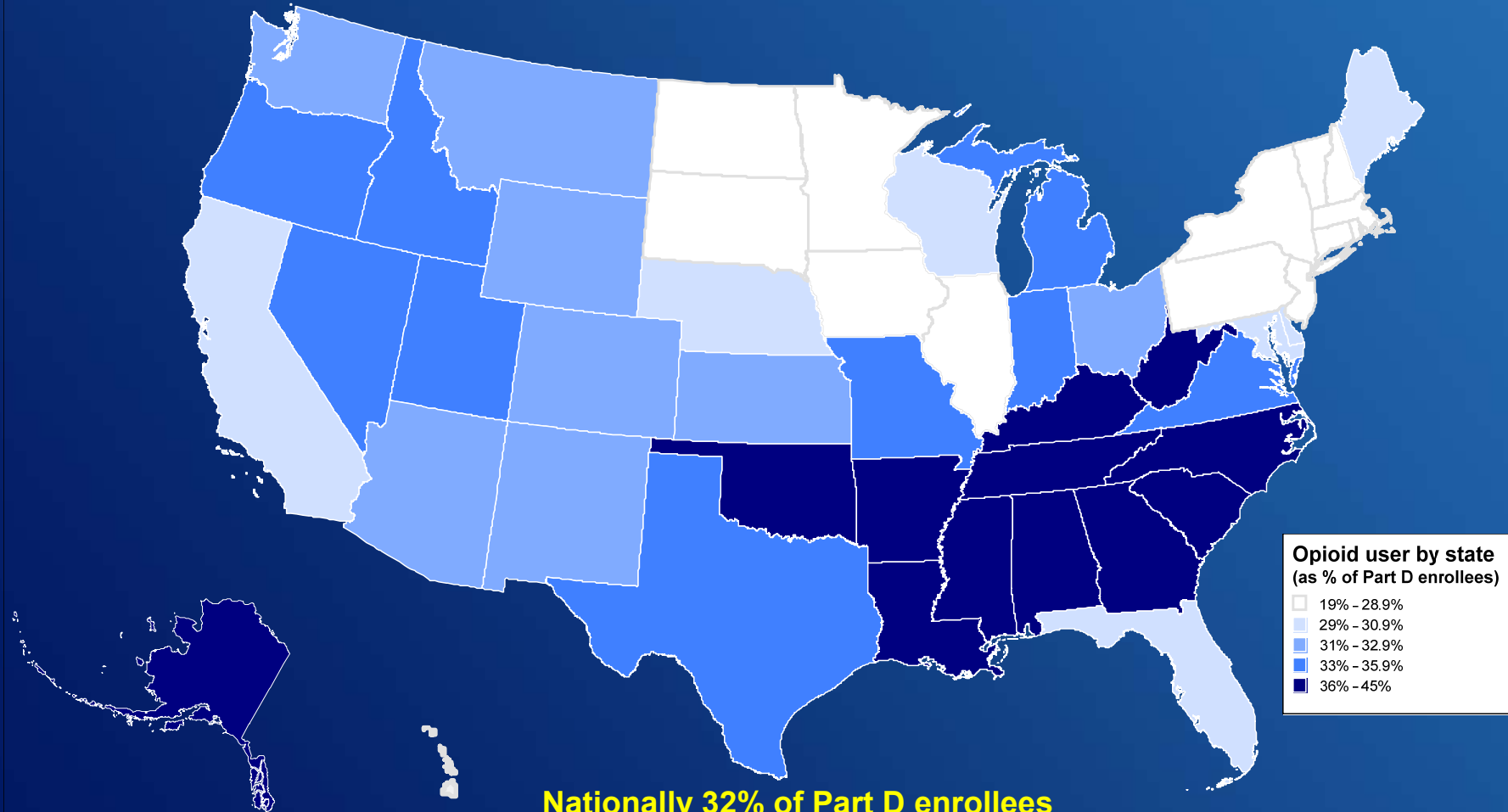
- In any given year,
 - Over 1/3 of Part D enrollees used opioid
 - Accounts for about 5% of total prescriptions and spending for drugs covered under Part D
- Some use may not be clinically appropriate
 - GAO/OIG found questionable use of opioids in Part D
 - Potentially increase Part D's program costs without providing health benefits
 - May harm beneficiaries

Analysis of opioid use by Part D enrollees, 2011

- 11.5 million beneficiaries (36%) filled at least one prescription for an opioid
 - About 400,000 used hospice during the year
 - About 1.1 million had cancer diagnosis (no hospice stays)
- Opioid use for pain associated with cancer and at the end of life is well established in medical literature
- Use of opioids to manage other pain may be appropriate but evidence of effectiveness is limited*

Our analysis focused on the 10 million in Part D without hospice stays or cancer diagnoses

Share of Part D enrollees who use opioids vary across states, 2011



Nationally 32% of Part D enrollees filled at least one opioid prescription (exclude hospice and cancer patients)

Opioid use in Part D, 2011

	All opioid users	Opioid users in top 5%
# of beneficiaries, millions	10.0	0.5
Total gross spending on opioids, billions	\$2.7	\$1.9
<i>As % of total opioid users</i>		69%
Total # of opioid prescriptions, millions	63.1	11.6
<i>As % of total opioid users</i>		18%
Average annual use per beneficiary		
Gross spending on opioids	\$271	\$3,716
# of opioid prescriptions	6.3	23.0
Generic share of opioid prescriptions	94%	78%

Preliminary data subject to change

Characteristics of opioid users, 2011

	All Part D enrollees	All opioid users**	Opioid users in top 5%**
# of beneficiaries, millions	31.5	10.0	0.5
Selected demographic characteristics			
% Female	59%	63%	61%
% non-White	26%	26%	17%
% under age 65 (disabled)	24%	31%	63%
% LIS	37%	47%	66%
Enrolled in PDP	64%	66%	74%
Obtained opioid Rx from ≥ 4 prescribers*		9%	29%
Filled opioid Rx at ≥ 3 pharmacies*		7%	31%
States w/ highest concentration of users		AL, TN, AR, KY, LA	DE, AK, NH, VT, WI

Preliminary data subject to change

Note: PDP (prescription drug plan), LIS (low-income subsidy). *Unique counts of prescribers and pharmacies are based on identification information submitted on the prescription drug event data. If a prescriber ordered prescriptions under multiple IDs, the claims from this prescriber under different IDs are treated as if they were ordered by different prescribers. **Excludes opioid users who had a hospice stay or a cancer diagnosis. Source: MedPAC analysis of Part D denominator and prescription drug event data.

CMS's policy on monitoring as of 2013

- Plan sponsors: drug utilization review
 - Safety edits at POS (e.g., refill too soon)
 - Utilization management (e.g., quantity limits)
 - Retrospective review
- CMS: Overutilization Monitoring System
 - Centralized system to track potential overuse
 - Quarterly overutilization reports

CMS's policy on monitoring as of 2015

- Changes affecting prescribers
 - Must be enrolled with Medicare
 - Deny prescriptions ordered by unauthorized individuals (e.g., suspended DEA certificate)
 - Revoke Medicare enrollment for abusive prescribing
- CMS efforts
 - Develop a tool to assess fraud/abuse risk of prescribers and pharmacies using Part D data
 - Expand the tool's capability to monitor potentially inappropriate use of other medications

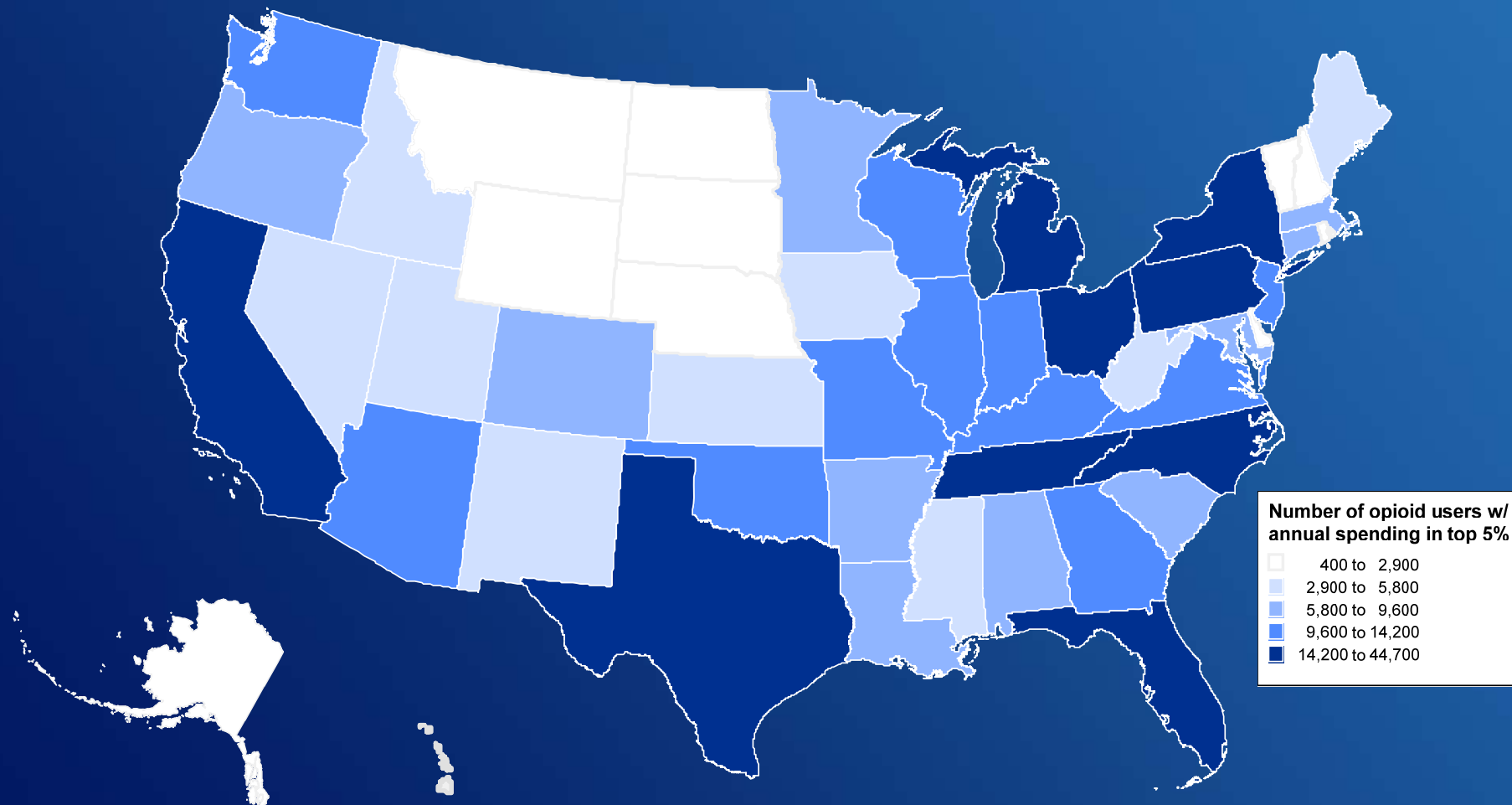
Other measures to curb opioid misuse and overuse

- Nearly all states have implemented Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs
- Some pharmacies use checklists before dispensing controlled substances (e.g., Walgreens “checklist”)
- Commercial insurance and some state Medicaid programs use prescriber and/or pharmacy “lock-in” for individuals at-risk of abusing controlled substances

Next steps?

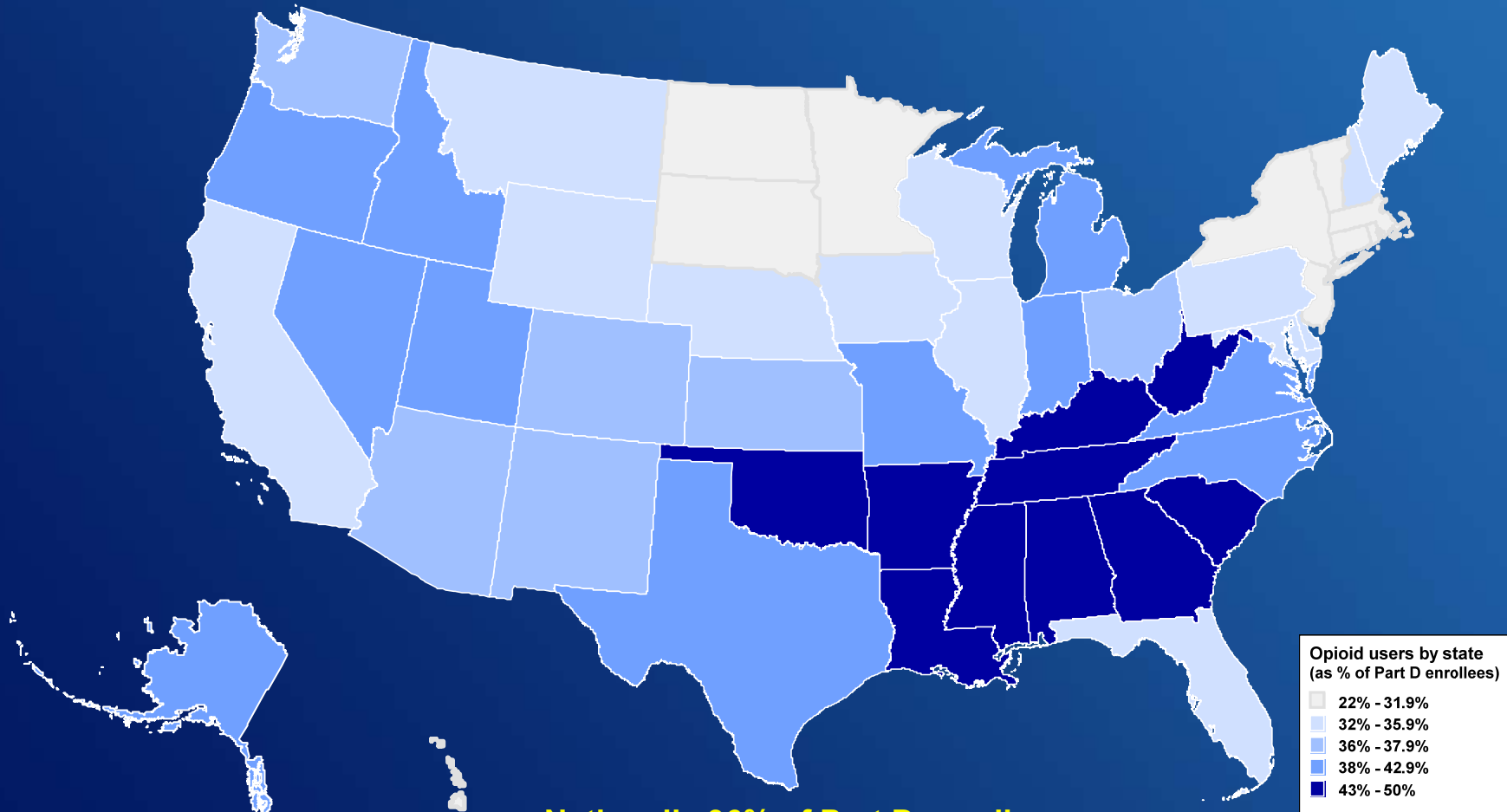
- Direction for this research?
 - Focus on prescribing in long-term care institutions
 - Effectiveness of existing frameworks and potential applications to prevent other inappropriate medication uses?
- Comments on other policy options?
 - Should we go further and consider other policy options such as lock-ins?
 - Any other policy options we should consider?

Distribution of opioid users with spending in the top 5 percent, 2011



**95th percentile in annual gross spending = \$956
(exclude hospice and cancer patients)**

Share of Part D enrollees who use opioids vary across states, 2011



Nationally 36% of Part D enrollees filled at least one opioid prescription