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*System Reform &
Redesign
Public Policy Alert*

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"nothin' ever doesn't change but nothin' changes much"
from "White Knuckles" by OK Go

And so it goes...yesterday the President extolled the measures taken by the current administration and congress to combat the opioid epidemic as he signed into law the "sweeping" opioid bill that does, in fact, have some positive aspects, but lacks the appropriation of the significant funding that would be necessary to give providers the opportunity to really get the job done. While HHS Secretary Alex Azar touts the belief that the U.S. is "beginning to turn the tide" on the opioid crisis, the data tell a different story. CDC reports that preliminary estimates for 2017 suggest that 72,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2017 which represents an increase of approximately ten percent over 2016. Initial 2018 projections by CDC for 2018 show similar results.

At least there is some cash backing up the rhetoric at a state level as the governor recently announced that \$5M is available to support 170 grants statewide to help secure 120 nurse practitioner and 50 certified peer recovery advocate positions for OASAS-licensed providers. Yeah, I know, \$5M is not a lot of cash, relatively speaking, but it's something... Act quickly, though, because RFA's and RFP's for the grants are due by November 7th (see our 10/24 Members' Alert for details).

Meanwhile, as the politicians focus on the opioid crisis (talking about it, I mean....not funding the effort to fight it), watch for a serious end run by the vapers! Juul has recently added impressively to its stable of lobbyists in Washington, hiring two new firms and one lobbyist to focus specifically on tariff relief. The up and coming vaping giant also reported spending \$560,000 on Washington lobbying in the third quarter of this year, up from \$210,000 the previous quarter. How many of your fellow behavioral health professionals do you talk to who get a quizzical look on their faces when you bring up the topic of Juuling? Want to learn more about the current state of vaping yourself? Hit one or both of our Fall Community Conversations on November 27th at the Hilton Garden Inn in Watertown (6 to 8 PM) and November 28th at the Crowne Plaza in Lake Placid (9 AM till noon).

While we are on the topic of nicotine and THC delivery systems, we have to look at the potential for legalized recreational marijuana and the expansion of medical marijuana use in NYS. While the Governor's office held listening sessions around "regulated marijuana use" across the State that would make it seem as if the decision-making process is ongoing, the "fact sheet" that was distributed at those sessions (watch your inbox for a copy) would indicate that the decision is made and legalization is imminent. However, in a recent conversation on the subject, Barry Brogan speculated that the Governor's enthusiasm for the popular issue of legalization may wane after he is re-elected on November 6th. We'll know soon enough. Also, a recent Denver Post article ("*It's High Time We Took a Breath from Marijuana Commercialization*" 9/28 by Bob Troyer) points out many negative, mostly unanticipated aspects of legalization that are being experienced in Colorado, very much in counterpoint to the NYS "fact sheet." And, meanwhile, the expansion of the medical use of the drug to include use for opioid dependence is receiving a harsh thumbs down from most treatment providers across the State, and ASAP has carried that torch back to OASAS and DOH. We seem to detect some backing-down on this one already in Albany.

We tend to win the battles one life at a time. But sometimes it feels like the war is slipping away.

~ Bud