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## **Opioid Epidemic Threatens to Undermine Massachusetts Fiscal Health for Years to Come, Study Finds**

*Report from Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF) explains why employers need to help combat the growing crisis and its devastating toll on people's lives, businesses and the economy*

*MTF to host a Forum on November 16 featuring Governor Baker, Attorney General Healey and an interview with Congressman Kennedy*

**Boston, MA – November 14, 2018** – The opioid crisis has become an epidemic that is having significant negative impacts on Massachusetts businesses and the state's economy, and will continue to do so unless decisive action is taken to reverse current ominous trends, according to a report issued today by the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, an independent, non-partisan public policy research organization.

The study, made possible by a grant from RIZE Massachusetts, a nonprofit created to end the opioid epidemic in Massachusetts, is the first attempt to quantify the strain of the opioid crisis on the Massachusetts economy and its cost to employers, health care providers, and state and municipal budgets.

"By exploring and explaining the economic and fiscal impacts of opioids on the state, we hope this report catalyzes greater urgency and engagement from all segments of our society in the battle against the scourge of this epidemic – particularly among Massachusetts employers," **said MTF President Eileen McAnney**. "All segments of our society must rally together to reverse the daunting trends and relieve the enormous human suffering and economic burden of this ever-expanding crisis."

MTF will host a Forum on November 16 to discuss how to best tackle opioids in Massachusetts. Featured speakers include Governor Charlie Baker, Attorney General Maura Healey, Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders, and other distinguished leaders from business, health care, and other human services. In addition, a videotaped interview with Congressman Joe Kennedy III will be aired during the event.

"The opioid and fentanyl epidemic is a tragic issue that sadly knows no geographic boundaries and impacts people from all walks of life in communities of all sizes," **said Governor Baker**. "While some progress is being made through initiatives like the implementation of the MassPAT prescription monitoring program, increased availability of naloxone, and a greater focus on tools like recovery coaches, there is still a lot of work left to do and we look forward to incorporating important data and analysis from this Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation report into our daily work to stem the tide of this public health epidemic."

"The opioid epidemic has reached just about every community in Massachusetts and across this country," **said Attorney General Healey**. "We see it within our own families, and among friends and neighbors. This comprehensive report brings a unique look into the economic and fiscal impacts of this devastating crisis on our state, and shows that while our efforts are making a difference – we have much more work to do. I look forward

to working with Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, RIZE, and the business community to continue finding ways to address this growing public health crisis.”

“We cannot adequately address our nation’s opioid epidemic until we truly understand its human, economic and societal costs,” **said Congressman Kennedy**. “With this report, we can begin to study how this crisis terrorizes our families and communities, and strains our health care system, our courts, our law enforcement and our businesses. Today, we will take a step forward in this fight, but we cannot rest until treatment is within reach for anyone who needs it.”

Among other alarming findings, the report reveals that the opioid epidemic is having an enormous impact on Massachusetts businesses by making an already tight labor market even more challenging, and calls upon business leaders to engage more directly and actively to seek solutions to this growing crisis.

The key findings of the report are:

**The opioid epidemic is far from over and will probably get worse.**

- The crisis has moved to its deadliest phase to date, characterized by a transition from heroin to fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances, including carfentanil and other fentanyl-related analogs which are 100 times more potent than fentanyl and 5,000 times more potent than heroin.
- The number of fentanyl-related deaths in the U.S. soared from 2,628 in 2012 to 29,406 in 2017, a ten-fold jump in just five years, and this trend shows no signs of abating.

**Massachusetts is at the forefront of the epidemic.**

- Massachusetts had the fourth highest rate of opioid-related deaths in the nation at 30.2 per 100,000 of population in 2016, which was 2.3 times greater than the U.S. average.
- Opioid-related deaths nearly quadrupled in Massachusetts from 560 in 2010 to 2,154 in 2016.

**The impact of opioids on businesses is significant.**

- Opioids have kept an estimated 32,700 people from participating in the labor force in Massachusetts over the past seven years, making it all the more challenging for employers to find people to fill open positions.
- Another estimated 143,000 employed individuals (4.2% of total employed in the state) report pain reliever misuse and experience on average 18 more days off from work than those who do not misuse prescription pain medications.
- Lost productivity from absenteeism and presenteeism (i.e., reduced job performance due to an illness, injury or anxiety) in the state is likely more than \$2.5 billion annually.

**The fiscal costs of the epidemic are enormous – and the trends are alarming.**

While the full costs of the opioid epidemic in Massachusetts cannot be quantified because, as noted in the report, costs in several areas cannot be calculated, the report estimates:

- Lost productivity in Massachusetts from people unable to work, foregone income due to fatalities, absenteeism and presenteeism, and excess health care costs to be approximately \$9.7 billion.
- Costs attributable to opioid programs and services across systems in Massachusetts (health care providers, the state and municipalities) to be at least \$5.5 billion.

“This report by MTF, confirms what we knew to be true, the opioid epidemic is not only taking an enormous toll on families everywhere, it is also costing Massachusetts billions of dollars and severely limiting our economic growth,” **said Dr. David Torchiana**, President and CEO of Partners HealthCare and RIZE Board Chair. “The size of

our response must meet the full scope of this crisis and we need to work together on community-wide solutions. Hopefully public, private and nonprofit sectors can continue to come together to change these trends, protect the future economy, and help those in the grips of this terrible disease.”

**Members of the media are invited to attend and cover the MTF Forum on November 16 at Bank of America, 225 Franklin Street, 5th Floor, Boston, MA, from 7:30 am – 11:30 am. For more information, please contact Andrea D’Attilio at [adattilio@mastaxpayers.org](mailto:adattilio@mastaxpayers.org) or 617-720-1000.**

About Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF):

Since its founding in 1932, the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF) has been widely recognized as the state’s premier public policy organization focused on state and local fiscal, tax and economic policies. Our mission is to provide public and private sector decision makers with unbiased research and constructive solutions that drive public policy in order to strengthen the state’s finances and position the Commonwealth for long-term growth.

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