

November 18, 2022

**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL JOINS BIPARTISAN COALITION URGING DEA TO EXTEND
TELEHEALTH FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER TREATMENT**

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul joined a bipartisan coalition of 45 attorneys general to urge the Drug Enforcement Administration and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to permanently extend telehealth flexibilities for prescribing buprenorphine, an opioid use disorder treatment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the FDA allowed doctors to use telehealth services to prescribe the medication, but the rule allowing buprenorphine to be prescribed virtually is set to expire once the COVID-19 public health emergency ends.

The United States is in the grips of an opioid crisis, with [more than 80,000 Americans](#) and [more than 3,000 people in Illinois](#) alone dying from opioid overdoses last year. Buprenorphine is one of three medications that is approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat patients suffering from opioid use disorder. Raoul and the attorneys general are calling for this treatment to remain easily available for those in need.

“The opioid epidemic has devastated our country, including communities and families throughout Illinois,” Raoul said. “Removing barriers to treatment is one meaningful step that will ease the burden of people currently struggling with substance use disorder. I urge the Drug Enforcement Administration and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to continue to allow for flexibility that has brought treatment to more people in our state who need it.”

As a condition of the COVID-19 public health emergency, in March 2020, the DEA began to allow audio-visual telemedicine services to prescribe all Schedule II-V controlled substances, including buprenorphine. Without the proposed permanent extension, the expiration of the public health emergency could cut off an estimated 2.5 million U.S. adults who utilize this opioid use disorder treatment.

In a letter to head DEA and SAMHSA officials, Raoul and the coalition highlight how the existing flexibilities are critical to connecting individuals with opioid use disorder to effective treatment. The attorneys general note that the number of patients receiving buprenorphine as treatment has increased significantly. Access to telehealth treatment has also improved retention in care and reduced the odds of overdose for patients.

The current allowance for telehealth services expanded access to patients who may have previously struggled to receive the medication. According to the letter, an estimated 28 million Americans live over 10 miles from a buprenorphine provider and about 3 million live over 30 miles from a buprenorphine provider.

The letter builds on Attorney General Raoul’s ongoing efforts to combat the opioid epidemic and hold accountable companies whose deceptive practices have increased opioid prescriptions at the expense of public health. On Nov. 15, Raoul’s office announced a settlement with Walmart that provides more than \$3 billion nationally and requires significant improvements to how Walmart’s pharmacies handle opioids. Raoul’s office also has an agreement in principle with opioid manufacturer Teva that would provide up to \$4.25 billion once finalized and an agreement in principle with former opioid maker Allergan that, once finalized, would require the company to pay up to \$2.37 billion to participating states and local governments to assist in battling the opioid epidemic.

Last year, Raoul’s office negotiated the Illinois Opioid Allocation Agreement. The agreement is intended to ensure the approximately \$760 million Illinois will receive through the historic national \$26 billion opioid settlement agreement with the nation’s three major pharmaceutical distributors and Johnson & Johnson, and

these additional opioid settlements, are allocated equitably, including to counties and eligible municipalities. The majority of Illinois' money will go to the Illinois Remediation Fund to be used for abatement programs throughout the state.

Raoul is joined in signing the letter by the attorneys general of and Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida , Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.