Opioid Treatment Programs Reported Challenges Encountered During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Actions Taken To Address Them

What OIG Found

OTPs reported a variety of: (1) challenges they have encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic and (2) actions they have taken to address those challenges while ensuring the continuity of needed services and protecting the health and safety of their patients and staff.

OTPs reported challenges related to: (1) maintaining pre-pandemic service levels (124 OTPs); (2) managing impacts on facility operations (113 OTPs); (3) implementing and using telehealth (87 OTPs); (4) obtaining treatment medications, personal protective equipment, and cleaning supplies (83 OTPs); (5) maintaining patient participation in OTP activities (77 OTPs); (6) dealing with limitations posed by existing Federal guidance (65 OTPs); (7) providing take-home doses to patients (51 OTPs); and (8) implementing governmental guidance (34 OTPs).

OTPs reported actions taken, including: (1) encouraging or requiring various personal safety measures for patients and staff (141 OTPs), (2) implementing or expanding the use of telehealth to continue providing services (128 OTPs), (3) increasing the number of take-home doses to reduce the number of patients visiting facilities (127 OTPs), (4) making physical changes to facilities and increasing staffing flexibilities (121 OTPs), and (5) ensuring that patients received treatment medications (92 OTPs).

Conclusion and SAMHSA Comments

The information in this report was gathered to support HHS’s goal of reducing opioid morbidity and mortality and to help SAMHSA by providing information on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on OTPs. This information was current when we conducted our interviews but may not represent all the challenges that OTPs have faced or the actions they have taken to address those challenges. We recognize that SAMHSA has taken actions to support OTPs as they work on the front lines to treat people diagnosed with opioid use disorders and to ensure the safety of the health care workforce. The information in this report provides SAMHSA and other decisionmakers (e.g., State and Tribal officials and other Federal agencies) with a national snapshot of OTPs’ challenges and the actions they have taken to continue providing services during the pandemic. In written comments on our draft report, SAMHSA described actions that it had taken after becoming aware of COVID-19’s impact on operations for its behavioral health stakeholders, such as providing technical assistance and training during the pandemic.

The full report can be found at https://oig.hhs.gov/oas/reports/region9/92001001.asp.