



**PRESS ADVISORY**  
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**Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman Sues Purdue Pharma for its  
Role in Creating the Opioid Epidemic**

**DENVER** – Attorney General Cynthia H. Coffman filed a lawsuit today against Purdue Pharma L.P. and Purdue Pharma, Inc. alleging that the companies’ fraudulent and deceptive marketing of prescription opioids played a significant role in causing the opioid epidemic ravaging Colorado and the rest of the nation. The lawsuit claims that Purdue misled Colorado health care providers and consumers about the addiction risks associated with prescription opioids and encouraged doctors to prescribe more opioids and at higher doses for longer periods of time. The result was a financial windfall for the company and a historic deadly epidemic that has killed thousands of Coloradans and left many thousands more struggling with opioid addiction.

The complaint alleges that Purdue’s decades-long marketing campaign sought to flood Colorado with prescription opioids. Purdue funded purportedly independent national pain organizations and experts and deployed an army of sales representatives to convince Colorado health care providers, policymakers, and the general public that prescription opioids were safe and effective for treating chronic pain. Specifically, the lawsuit claims that:

- Purdue downplayed the risk of addiction associated with opioids and the extent to which it could be managed;
- Purdue exaggerated the benefits of opioid treatment by overstating their efficacy at treating chronic non-cancer pain and improving patients’ functionality and quality of life;
- Purdue manufactured a fake syndrome called “pseudoaddiction” in order to counter claims that opioids could lead to abuse and addiction;
- Purdue deceptively advised health care professionals that they could manage and avoid addiction in their patients;

- Purdue misrepresented that OxyContin is effective for 12 hours, which led doctors and patients to increase the frequency and dosages of OxyContin and enhance the likelihood of addiction;
- Purdue downplayed the increased risks posed by higher dosages of prescription opioids and advised health care professionals that they were violating their Hippocratic Oath and failing their patients unless they treated pain symptoms with opioids;
- Purdue overstated the efficacy of abuse-deterrent formulations of opioids;
- Purdue downplayed the severity of opioid withdrawal; and
- Purdue misrepresented the risks and benefits of opioids as compared to the risks and benefits associated with alternative pain treatments.

The lawsuit accuses Purdue of violating the Colorado Consumer Protection Act by engaging in fraudulent business practices and creating a public nuisance that endangered the public.

“Purdue unleashed a surge of prescription opioids on Coloradans while hiding the facts about their drugs’ addictive properties,” said Attorney General Coffman. “Their corporate focus on making money took precedence over patients’ long-term health, and Colorado has been paying the price in loss of life and devastation of its communities as they struggle to address the ongoing opioid crisis. Purdue’s habit-forming medications coupled with their reckless marketing have robbed children of their parents, families of their sons and daughters, and destroyed the lives of our friends, neighbors, and co-workers. While no amount of money can bring back loved-ones, it can compensate for the enormous costs brought about by Purdue’s intentional misconduct.”

"Purdue failed in its responsibility to ensure that consumers understood the risks associated with their products," said Governor John Hickenlooper. "We applaud this action and believe it is appropriate to safeguard the health of all Coloradans. We will do everything we can to support transparency in health care. Pharmaceutical companies play a vital role in our health care system, but trust in those companies and their products is critical."

As detailed in the complaint, between 1999 and 2017, there have been approximately 3,000 prescription opioid-related deaths in Colorado, not including overdoses from synthetic opioids such as Fentanyl, or those who turned to heroin when they were no longer able to afford or access prescription opioids. Despite a decline in overall opioid prescriptions in Colorado since 2013, the 372 opioid deaths

in 2017 represent a 26% increase in just the last four years. Colorado's most vulnerable citizens have been especially impacted by the opioid epidemic. As of 2014, 3.6 of every 1,000 children born in a Colorado hospital suffer from neonatal abstinence syndrome, a 160% increase from 1999.<sup>1</sup> And opioid-related hospitalizations for Coloradans over the age of 65 increased by 83% over the past eight years.<sup>2</sup>

Attorney General Coffman has been part of a bipartisan coalition of over 40 state attorneys general investigating and prosecuting opioid manufacturers and distributors for their role in causing the opioid epidemic. As announced in 2017, Coffman and her colleagues in other states issued subpoenas to Endo Pharmaceuticals, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Teva Pharmaceuticals, and Allergan plc, as well as the drug distributors AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health, and McKesson. Colorado has been among the states leading the investigations of these companies over the past year. The Colorado Attorney General's Office has created a unit within the office focused specifically on the opioid investigation, and this team possesses the requisite expertise to best represent the state's interest in this complicated issue. "Having the Attorney General's Office represent the state ensures that any money obtained from litigation is returned to Colorado communities and those directly impacted by the opioid crisis, rather than going to pay for private law firm fees," Coffman explained.

"Today's lawsuit is only the beginning," said Coffman. "My office, in partnership with federal, state, and local authorities around the country, will continue to investigate and pursue justice against drug companies that earn billions of dollars from prescription opioids while millions of people suffer and die. My office stands with all of those first responders, physicians, nurses, social workers, teachers, state agencies, and nonprofits in Colorado that work on the front lines of this epidemic every day. And to those parents, children, friends, and neighbors who continue to fight the scourge of opioid addiction, my office and our state and national partners are committed to holding drug companies accountable and getting you the help you need."

Because Purdue has claimed that certain information in the complaint is confidential, the Attorney General has filed the complaint under temporary seal and has asked the court to keep the complaint sealed no longer than 10 days. The

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<sup>1</sup>Haight SC, Ko JY, Tong VT, Bohm MK, Callaghan WM. Opioid Use Disorder Documented at Delivery Hospitalization — United States, 1999–2014. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2018;67:845–849. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6731a1>

<sup>2</sup> Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), Opioid-Related Hospital Use- Part of HHS <https://www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/faststats/OpioidUseServlet?radio-3=on&location1=CO&characteristic1=02&setting1=IP&location2=US&characteristic2=01&setting2=IP&expandInfoState=hide&dataTablesState=show&definitionsState=hide&exportState=hide>  
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Attorney General is adamant that the public interest in these allegations and the information supporting them far outweighs any of Purdue's privacy concerns, particularly since much of the information has been disclosed in similar lawsuits around the country.

Purdue manufactures, promotes, markets, advertises, and sells its own specific prescription opioids including: Butrans (buprenorphine), Dilaudid (hydromorphone hydrochloride), Dilaudid-HP (hydromorphone hydrochloride), Hysingla ER (hydrocodone bitrate), MS Contin (morphine sulfate extended release), OxyContin (oxycodone hydrochloride extended release), Ryzolt (tramadol HCl extended-release), and Targiniq ER (oxycodone hydrochloride and naloxone hydrochloride).

In addition to today's lawsuit, Attorney General Coffman continues to pursue other avenues for addressing the opioid crisis in Colorado. She chairs the Colorado Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force, which worked with multiple partners, including the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, to produce the groundbreaking *Heroin in Colorado* report in 2017. The report focused on examining the scope of the heroin crisis in Colorado and evaluated potential areas in need of critical response. A copy of that report can be found at

<http://www.corxconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/Heroin-in-Colorado-FINAL-April-2017.pdf>.

Attorney General Coffman also has led the highly successful Colorado Naloxone for Life Initiative, which is a statewide partnership to save lives with the opioid overdose reversal medication, Naloxone, by providing training and access to the medication to law enforcement agencies and first responders across Colorado. To date, the program has reported more than 400 overdose reversals. More information about the program can be found at <https://coag.gov/press-room/press-releases/09-19-16>.

For anyone who is struggling with addiction, there are services available to help. For more information go to: <http://www.corxconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/OTP.pdf> or contact: <http://coloradocrisisservices.org/>

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