C-DIAS
Center for Dissemination & Implementation At Stanford

What Can We Learn From NIDA's Implementation Science Portfolio (2015–2024)?

The Public Health Problem

Implementation science can fill gaps in addiction treatment. However, the real-world impact of implementation science hinges on the priorities of research funding agencies.

Tracking shifts in National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding is important, especially as 2025 budget cuts were expected to greatly harm health care and the economy.

Background

The fourth wave of the U.S. opioid epidemic (2015 to present) is defined by opioid and stimulant use.

Implementation science remains a small part of combatting the opioid epidemic. Only one-third of NIDA-funded treatment studies from 2015–2019 were implementation-focused, though the rigor of NIDA's implementation studies between 2007–2023 steadily increased.

What This Article Addresses

Researchers:

- Updated an earlier review of NIDA-funded studies from 2015–2019 (Cheng et al., 2021) with data from 2020–2024.
- Characterized implementation study elements among NIDA-funded studies.
- Proposed ways to improve implementation science uptake to address the opioid epidemic.

What They Did *(Methods)*

Researchers extracted implementation-focused study characteristics from implementation-focused study abstracts, such as Implementation Preparation and Research studies, of opioid and stimulant use disorder treatment.

What They Discovered *(Findings)*

The number of implementation-focused studies on opioid and stimulant use disorder treatment increased by 38.6% in 2020–2024, compared to 2015–2019.

Implementation-focused studies peaked in 2019 and 2022, aligning with the start of NIH opioid research initiatives, such as the Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL) Initiative.

Core implementation study components were inconsistently reported, including frameworks, methods, and outcomes, across Implementation Preparation and Implementation Research studies.

Opportunities for Action

The study findings highlight opportunities for:

Payors & Decision-Makers

- **Promote implementation science research initiatives** that can help studies grow beyond the clinical trial phase.
- **Fund implementation science** to accelerate the translation of effective treatments into real-world settings.

Researchers

- **Add implementation science components** into effectiveness and feasibility trials.
- **Add cost and strategy evaluations** into early implementation studies, such as hybrid type 1 and 2 trials.
- **Standardize reporting guidelines** for implementation science components within research proposals.

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