

**Thesis Proposal:**

**A study of the connection between the Affordable Care Act and the economic burden of the  
US produced by the opioid epidemic**

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Er Yearn Jang

Department of Biology & Chemistry, Liberty University

1971 University Blvd. Lynchburg, VA

## **Abstract**

Within the last two decades, the rate of overdoses from opioids has become one of the leading causes of death, higher than car accidents and suicides. A negative effect of this opioid epidemic, besides the loss of lives, is the great economic burden it has brought to the United States; it was more than 500 billion dollars in 2015. Therefore, this opioid crisis must be minimized, not simply for the decrease in mortality rates and improvement of the quality of life, but to stop the growth of the economic burden. In this proposed thesis, one way to cease the growth of this cost will be studied. The studied method is the management of the opioid crisis through healthcare laws. With the current period of transition from one presidency to another, it is not yet clear what policies might be established, and thus, what will become of the economic burden. This proposed thesis will specifically explore the relationship between the Affordable Care Act and its impact on the epidemic, so that any correlations found may inform future healthcare policies.

## **Introduction**

Today, the amount of people that die from overdosing on opioids is higher than the number of deaths due to car accidents and suicide. Since the year 2000, more than 300,000 have lost their lives to overdosing on opioids. Last year, President Trump declared the opioid crisis a national health emergency. The urgency to stop this epidemic has led to steps to better regulate prescription drugs, research on non-addictive painkillers, and to rehabilitate those that are addicted.

Although the above considerations address several important facets of this crisis, another concern has yet to be more clearly addressed. The question still looms: What will be done of the economic consequences from the damage done? The worry has been voiced that it may have impacted the labor force and punched a hole in the productivity of the US economy. The economic burden directly caused by this opioid epidemic was estimated at 78.5 billion dollars in 2013. Since 1971, there has been a toll of 1 trillion dollars on the government to fight this drug war. The growth of the opioid epidemic must be reduced, if not halted, to stop the economic burden from further accumulating. It is indisputable that one approach to doing this is by installing appropriate healthcare laws.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as “Obamacare”, was launched under President Obama in 2010. There is controversy as to whether the ACA decreased or increased the severity of this epidemic. Was the expansion of Medicaid to increase the access to treatment for opioid addiction beneficial? Or did it open a way for prescription opioids, such as Methadone, Oxycodone, and Hydrocodone, to be abused by the public? With the impending possibility of the abrogation of the ACA, it is important, now more than ever, that the

relationship between the ACA and the opioid epidemic be revealed so that we may understand what certain consequences policies might hold in store for the US economy.

### **Thesis Statement**

The proposed thesis will examine the impact the ACA had on both the providers and consumers of opioids, and thus its role, if any, on the escalation of the opioid epidemic. The thesis will also explore possible implications repeal of the ACA may have on the opioid epidemic and its impact on the US economy in the future.

### **Literature Review and Method**

The thesis will be divided into three parts. The first section will describe opiates from a medicinal standpoint. The objective of it is to provide an adequate background of how and why opiates can be addictive. This knowledge is pertinent to deciphering whether various treatments will alleviate addiction and if the suggested policies to combat this epidemic are scientifically reasonable.

The second section will examine the ACA's impact on the opioid crisis through two categories of policies. The 'provider' category (pharmaceutical companies and healthcare providers) will include ACA's laws on the prescription and distribution of drugs. The 'consumer' category will include the policies pertaining to the prevention and treatment of opioid addiction. Both will answer how the ACA may have expanded or diminished the pool of opioid abusers. The first perspective will answer this question by seeing how effectively the ACA inhibited the growth of opioid addiction and the second by seeing if the ACA reduced the present population of opioid abusers. This section will finish with a look at the overall impact the ACA had on the opioid crisis.

The third component will begin with a review of the foreseeable consequences of the economic burden that already exists. Next, the conclusions gathered as to how the ACA impacted the opioid epidemic will be used to anticipate the effects a repeal of ACA or the new establishment of the American Health Care Act (AHCA) might have. Finally, to conclude the thesis, the medicinal study of opioids done in the beginning will be utilized to review various methods of treatment for addiction and assess their efficiencies. This discussion will be beneficial because it will elucidate which treatments might fit best for public healthcare in the future.

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