



Alabama tops for prescription opioid use, 33rd in lobbying

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By The Associated Press

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Alabama has the highest level of prescription opioid use in the country, and companies that make the painkillers and their allies have hired an average of 18 lobbyists annually in the state since 2006 to push their policies.

A joint investigation by The Associated Press and the Center for Public Integrity found that companies that make prescription opioid painkillers and allied groups nationwide have spent more than \$880 on campaign contributions and lobbying over the past decade as the work to influence state and federal policies. The groups hired an annual average of 1,350 lobbyists in state capitals around the country from 2006 through 2015 and contributed to 7,100 candidates for state-level office, according to the investigation.

The groups have an array of political interests that include opioid advocacy.

By comparison, groups seeking limits on opioid prescribing spent about \$4 million.

The organizations' lobbying in Alabama ranked 33rd in the country when drug makers' lobbying hires are compared to all lobbying activity.

The groups' campaign contributions in Alabama ranked 28th in the nation using a ratio of all campaign contributions in each state.

Reporters analyzed campaign finance and lobbying data from 2006 through 2015. Here's a look at the amount of money and resources spent in Alabama and how the state ranks.

PRESCRIPTIONS:

Alabama had more than 5.8 million opioid prescriptions written in 2015. That equates to a rate of 1.2 prescriptions per person, the highest rate in the country. By comparison, the national per capita was 0.71 in 2015.

LOBBYISTS:

Since 2006, Alabama has had an average of 18 registered lobbyists each

year employed by members of the Pain Care Forum, a coalition of companies and advocacy groups that meets to discuss opioid-related issues. Alabama ranked 33rd among states for the Pain Care Forum member lobbyists it had in proportion to its overall number of lobbyists. The number of lobbyists employed in Alabama has grown from 13 in 2006 to 26 in 2015.

CONTRIBUTIONS:

Alabama candidates and parties have received at least \$539,350 in contributions from Pain Care Forum members since 2006. Alabama ranks 28th in the country for PCF member contributions compared with overall contributions.

DEATHS:

There were 5,128 deaths from overdoses in Alabama from 2006 through 2014. The state's death rate per 100,000 in 2014 was 14.9.

The number of overdose deaths climbed 82 percent from 2006 to 2014. The overdose deaths aren't limited to opioids, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has indicated that prescription opioids and heroin account for the majority of drug deaths.