

Facts about opioids, political cash in Nevada

By Michelle Rindels, AP

Heavy-duty prescription painkillers like hydrocodone and OxyContin are a big part of medicine in Nevada, with doctors prescribing them at a rate that nearly reached one per person last year.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in the state get a huge chunk of their campaign cash from donors with ties to the prescription painkiller business.

But Nevada isn't alone: a joint investigation by The Associated Press and the Center for Public Integrity found that drugmakers that produce opioid painkillers and allied advocacy groups spent more than \$880 million on campaign contributions and lobbying nationwide over the past decade. The money comes from members of the Pain Control Forum – a loosely affiliated group that touts prescription opioids as having a vital role in improving the quality of life for millions of Americans.

By comparison, groups advocating for limits on opioid prescribing spent about \$4 million nationwide.

Things to know about political spending by the painkiller industry and opioid use in Nevada:

Drug spending: Between 2006 and 2015, members of the Pain Care Forum contributed more than \$855,000 in Nevada. Among all states, Nevada has the highest portion of total political contributions that come from Pain Care Forum members.

Drug lobbyists: There have been about 19 lobbyists hired each year for the past decade to represent members of the Pain Care

Forum in Nevada.

Prescriptions: Prescriptions for opioid painkillers are common in Nevada, with nearly 2.4 million prescriptions issued in 2015. That's the equivalent of .83 prescriptions per person.

Drug deaths: The number of Nevadans dying from drug overdoses is on the rise. The state's drug deaths increased 18 percent between 2006 and 2014, with a total of 5,007 during that period. Though the drug death data isn't limited to opioids, the CDC has indicated that prescription opioids and heroin account for the majority of drug deaths.