

WisDems: Ron Johnson pushes false claim that Medicaid expansion increased opioid abuse

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MADISON, Wis. — Senator Ron Johnson, who has long fought against efforts to make health care more affordable for Wisconsinites, was caught on tape pushing false information about Medicaid expansion being an “entitlement program” that “paid people not to work” and “gave people access to opioids.”

American Independent: [Ron Johnson pushes false claim that Medicaid expansion increased opioid abuse](#)

By: Jacob Gardenswartz

Key Points:

- In a speech earlier this month, Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) falsely claimed that expanding the number of Americans who qualify for Medicaid led to an increase in opioid use.
- “There are so many different entitlement programs that pay people not to work,” Johnson said in the speech. “One of them was Medicaid expansion, which allowed, you know, gave access to some of these working-age men, access to opioids for free, for three bucks, and then [they] sell them on the

open market.

- But multiple studies have found that Medicaid expansion was associated with a decrease in opioid-involved hospitalizations and deaths, not an increase as Johnson claimed.
- In a January 2020 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network Open, researchers found that “adoption of Medicaid expansion was associated with a 6% lower rate of total opioid overdose deaths compared with the rate in non-expansion states.”
- The researchers concluded that Medicaid expansion could serve as a “critical component of state efforts to address the continuing opioid overdose epidemic.”
- A separate study from March 2020 published by JAMA Internal Medicine also found evidence that Medicaid expansion was associated with a reduction in opioid use. Researchers analyzed data from 46 states and the District of Columbia and found that Medicaid expansion was associated with a 9.7% reduction in the rate of opioid-related inpatient hospitalizations.
- This isn't the first time Johnson has made baseless claims about a supposed link between Medicaid and opioid use. In 2018, while serving as chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Johnson released a report titled, “Drugs for Dollars: How Medicaid Helps Fuel the Opioid Epidemic.”
- Public health experts pushed back against the report's claims at a 2018

Congressional hearing.

- When asked for evidence linking Medicaid expansion to the rise in opioid use, a spokesperson for Johnson's office pointed The American Independent Foundation to Johnson's report and his opening remarks at a hearing. The spokesperson did not address the studies showing that Medicaid lowered opioid hospitalizations and deaths.