

# Maker of OxyContin gets hit with another state lawsuit

May 14 2019, by Geoff Mulvihill

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Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro arrives at a news conference in Philadelphia, Tuesday, May 14, 2019. Shapiro filed a lawsuit Tuesday accusing the company that makes OxyContin of fueling the opioid epidemic, making it at least the 39th state to make such a claim against Purdue Pharma. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

Pennsylvania's state attorney general filed a lawsuit Tuesday accusing the company that makes OxyContin of fueling the opioid epidemic, making it at least the 39th state to make such a claim against Purdue Pharma.

Attorney General Josh Shapiro announced the lawsuit against Connecticut-based Purdue. Pennsylvania is one of the states hardest hit by addiction to opioids, a class of drugs that includes powerful prescription painkillers such as OxyContin, along with heroin and fentanyl.

Shapiro's office two years ago joined with dozens of other states to investigate companies that make and distribute opioid painkillers. Like other states that have sued, Pennsylvania's claims are rooted in company documents handed over in that investigation.

Elsewhere, Purdue lawyers have asserted that states are cherry-picking portions of them to make the company look worse, usually noting that the company accounts for a small portion of opioids prescribed in the U.S. and that heroin and especially illicit fentanyl, not prescription drugs, are what drove up fatal overdose rates in recent years.

Around 2,000 local governments, including several in Pennsylvania, along with unions, hospitals and Native American tribes have also sued various industry players including Purdue and other drugmakers, distributors and pharmacies.



Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro speaks during a news conference in Philadelphia, Tuesday, May 14, 2019. Shapiro filed a lawsuit Tuesday accusing the company that makes OxyContin of fueling the opioid epidemic, making it at least the 39th state to make such a claim against Purdue Pharma. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

About 1,500 of those cases have been consolidated under one federal judge in Cleveland. Though Alabama is the only state involved in that group of cases, the judge has given state attorneys general a role in trying to work out a massive settlement. The first trial in that set of cases is scheduled to start in October.

Purdue, a privately held company based in Stamford, Connecticut, earlier this year publicly threatened bankruptcy as the litigation mounts.

Some states have also started suing members of the Sackler family, which includes prominent philanthropists and owns the firm.

In March, the company and the Sacklers settled a case with Oklahoma for \$270 million. The company settled with Kentucky in 2015 for \$24 million.

Nationally, opioids have been causing more deaths annually than car crashes. For 2017, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tallied a record of nearly 48,000 opioid deaths.

In Pennsylvania, the state Health Department said that more than 4,200 people died of overdoses involving any drug last year, down from nearly 5,600 in 2017.

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Citation: Maker of OxyContin gets hit with another state lawsuit (2019, May 14) retrieved 28 April 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-maker-oxycontin-state-lawsuit.html>

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