

Issue brief: Nation's drug-related overdose and death epidemic continues to worsen

***Updated December 22, 2022**

The nation's drug overdose and death epidemic continues to worsen. The epidemic affects every state and now is driven by illicitly manufactured fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine, often in combination or in adulterated forms. More than 107,000 deaths were [reported](#) in the United States between January 2021 to January 2022. The AMA continues to urge policymakers' action to increase access to evidence-based care for substance use disorders, pain and harm reduction measures. The news articles, reports and other information below cite data from multiple and varied sources, including national, state and local public health agencies, law enforcement, emergency medical services, hospitals, treatment centers, and journals. Recent AMA advocacy, resources and recommendations to end the epidemic also are below.

- [Recommendations from the AMA Substance Use and Pain Care Task Force](#) and [AMA 2022 Overdose Epidemic national report](#) Updated recommendations that highlight physicians' actions as well as additional steps that must be taken to have a meaningful impact on reducing drug-related mortality and improving patient outcomes.
- [AMA-Manatt Health 2022 state policy toolkit](#) provides more than 400 specific laws, regulations, policy guidance and other actions being implemented to help reduce mortality and improve outcomes. The toolkit builds on the 2020 [AMA-Manatt Health national policy roadmap](#) use of best practices to increase access to evidence-based care for mental illness, substance use disorders, comprehensive pain care and harm reduction initiatives.
- [The Fight to End the Nation's Overdose Epidemic and Restore Compassionate Care: Profiles in Leadership](#) profiles the work of more than 25 practicing physicians, policymakers, researchers and advocates working daily to reduce drug-related mortality and improve patient outcomes. December 2022.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on November 4, 2022, released its [CDC Clinical Practice Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Pain—United States, 2022](#), which CDC said "updates and replaces" the 2016 guideline. The CDC makes clear in its revision that the updated guideline "is meant to be a flexible clinical tool and should not be used as a rigid standard of care or one-size-fits-all policy or law." The AMA urges all states, payers, pharmacy chains and others to review, revise and rescind any laws or policies based on the 2016 guideline.
- Recent federal activity includes an [AMA letter urging Congress](#) to hold health plans accountable for nearly 15 years of failures in complying with the 2008 Mental Health Parity And Equity Addiction Act; [AMA comments on Biden Administration's 2022 National Drug Control Strategy](#).
- AMA issue brief on [key considerations for employers during the drug overdose epidemic](#). This includes reviewing benefit plans for patients and families with substance use disorders, mental illness and/or pain; promoting harm reduction at work; and reducing stigma.

See below for national news and other reports from all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

For more information, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org

National reports

(State-by-state reports begin on page 9 below)

- **These 8 states are doing the worst job of treating hepatitis C in prisons.**
<https://www.statnews.com/2022/12/15/states-worst-job-treating-hepatitis-c-in-prisons/>
December 15, 2022
- **In rural America, deadly costs of opioids outweigh the dollars tagged to address them.**
<https://www.kunc.org/health/2022-12-14/in-rural-america-deadly-costs-of-opioids-outweigh-the-dollars-tagged-to-address-them> December 14, 2022
- **Endocarditis in patients with cocaine or opioid use disorder saw marked increase between 2011 to 2022.** <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/endocarditis-patients-cocaine-or-opioid-use-disorder-saw-marked-increase-between-2011-2022> December 13, 2022
- **U.S. opioid crackdown hampers some patients' access to psychiatric drugs.**
<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-opioid-crackdown-hits-some-patients-access-psychiatric-drugs-2022-12-12/> December 12, 2022
- **Cause of death: Washington faltered as fentanyl gripped America.**
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/dea-fentanyl-failure/>
December 12, 2022
- **Drug overdose deaths during pregnancy and postpartum rose sharply in recent years, study shows.** <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/06/health/pregnancy-drug-overdose-deaths-study/index.html> December 6, 2022
- **Schools stockpile medication to combat rise in fentanyl overdoses.**
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/schools-stockpile-medication-to-combat-rise-in-fentanyl-overdoses> December 6, 2022
- **New research finds racial disparity in use and access to medications for opioid use disorder.** <https://www.rti.org/news/new-research-finds-racial-disparity-use-and-access-medications-opioid-use-disorder> November 29, 2022
- **Walmart agrees to \$3.1 billion opioid settlement framework.**
<https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/15/business/walmart-opioid-settlement> November 15, 2022
- **Medication Treatment for Addiction Is Shorter for Black and Hispanic Patients, Study Finds.** <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/09/health/opioid-addiction-treatment-racial-disparities.html>? November 9, 2022
- **How to Talk to Kids About Drugs in the Age of Fentanyl.**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/08/opinion/fentanyl-teens.html> November 8, 2022
- **CDC Releases New Opioid Guidelines: What to Know.**
<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/cdc-releases-new-opioid-guidelines-what-to-know>
November 8, 2022
- **FDA warns about the risk of xylazine exposure.** November 8, 2022.
<https://www.fda.gov/media/162981/download>
- **The other Supreme Court ruling with big repercussions for U.S. health care.**
<https://www.scotusblog.com/2022/10/the-other-supreme-court-ruling-with-big-repercussions-for-u-s-health-care/> October 24, 2022
- **'Imminent' need for Narcan on campus: School safety leader says fentanyl threat is real, preparation is key.** <https://lookout.co/santacruz/civic-life/story/2022-09-29/fentanyl-crisis-imminent-need-for-narcan-on-campus-school-safety-leader-says-fentanyl-threat-is-real-preparation-key> September 29, 2022
- **The Persistent Criminalization of Pregnant People Who Use Drugs.**
<https://www.networkforphl.org/news-insights/the-persistent-criminalization-of-pregnant-people-who-use-drugs/> September 16, 2022

- **Out-of-Pocket Cost of Naloxone May Keep Many Uninsured from Using Lifesaving Treatment.** <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2022/08/19.html> August 19, 2022
- **Mental Health Parity at a Crossroads. Kaiser Family Foundation.** <https://www.kff.org/private-insurance/issue-brief/mental-health-parity-at-a-crossroads/> August 18, 2022
- **Methamphetamine, Opioid Co-Use Tied to More Nonfatal Overdoses.** <https://consumer.healthday.com/methamphetamine-opioid-co-use-tied-to-more-nonfatal-overdoses-2657859492.html> August 15, 2022
- **Meth use is driving overdose epidemic in rural America—not opioids.** <https://studyfinds.org/meth-overdose-epidemic-rural/> August 15, 2022
- **Walmart has a new policy denying some telehealth prescriptions for controlled drugs. It's implicating patients in recovery.** <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/digital-health/new-policy-walmart-denies-telehealth-prescriptions-without-person-visit> August 9, 2022
- **Once feared, illicit fentanyl is now a drug of choice for many opioid users.** <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/feared-illicit-fentanyl-now-drug-choice-many-opioids-users-rcna40418> August 7, 2022
- **Almost 90 Percent of People with Opioid Use Disorder Not Receiving Lifesaving Medication.** <https://nyulangone.org/news/almost-90-percent-people-opioid-use-disorder-not-receiving-lifesaving-medication> August 4, 2022
- **Telehealth treatment for addiction was a rare pandemic success. Why is it in jeopardy?** <https://www.grid.news/story/science/2022/07/29/telehealth-treatment-for-addiction-was-a-rare-pandemic-success-why-is-it-in-jeopardy/> July 29, 2022
- **Study: Gabapentin-Related Overdose Deaths Increasing. Associated with Opioid Use.** <https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/study-gabapentin-related-overdose-deaths-increasing-associated-with-opioid-use> July 21, 2022
- **To Save Lives, Prioritize Treatment For Opioid Use Disorder in Correctional Facilities.** <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20220615.871779/> June 22, 2022
- **The college checklist: Bedding, reading lamp and fentanyl test strips?** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/06/09/fentanyl-strips-teens-college-overdose/> June 9, 2022
- **Patients seek mental health care from their doctor but find health plans standing in the way.** <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220608/Patients-seek-mental-health-care-from-their-doctor-but-find-health-plans-standing-in-the-way.aspx> June 8, 2022
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- **Tribal leaders sound the alarm after fentanyl overdoses spike at Blackfeet Nation.** <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/06/01/1101799174/tribal-leaders-sound-the-alarm-after-fentanyl-overdoses-spike-at-blackfeet-natio> June 1, 2022
- **Opioid abuse treatments don't reach those most at risk.** <https://www.axios.com/2022/05/12/opioid-abuse-treatments-overdose-deaths> May 12, 2022
- **US overdose deaths hit record 107,000 last year, CDC says.** <https://apnews.com/article/overdose-deaths-opioids-fentanyl-8cb302a70ddbb6a435f9e8fbb19f153b> May 11, 2022 (AMA statement: <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-statement-overdose-deaths-reaching-over-100000-past-year>)
- **America's response to addiction relies on fixing this website.** <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/11/health/national-addiction-treatment-locator-khn/index.html> May 11, 2022

- **HHS needs to step up so CDC's new guidelines won't be a bridge to nowhere for most Americans living with chronic pain.** <https://www.statnews.com/2022/04/29/cdc-guidelines-bridge-to-nowhere-chronic-pain-patients/> April 29, 2022
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- **Suicides by drug overdose increased among young people, elderly people, and Black women, despite overall downward trend.** <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/suicides-drug-overdose-increased-among-young-people-elderly-people-black-women-despite-overall-downward-trend> February 7, 2022
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