

KEY FINDINGS



The Overdose Crisis Across the Nation:

A Critical Analysis of Recent Trends and
Recommendations for Sustaining Effective
Interventions

Overdose deaths in the United States reached record levels in 2022

- The latest data from the CDC show that in 2022 more than 110,000 people died from drug overdoses nationwide – more than 300 people each day
- This tragically high level of overdose deaths shows little change from the alarming new highs seen during the COVID-19 pandemic

For the first time in recent years, there is a notable divergence in trends across states and counties

- Previously, the overarching trend indicated a consistent rise in deaths, albeit at varying rates among different localities.
- Currently, however, some counties have demonstrated significant reductions in death rates, indicating the effectiveness of interventions, while others continue to experience an accelerated increase.
- This suggests that while certain localities are successfully implementing measures to curb the trend, others require more targeted interventions.

Prescription opioids are contributing less to the crisis than before

- In the first phase of the opioid crisis, beginning in the late 1990s, the over-prescription of painkillers, fueled by misinformation about addiction risks, led to a surge in misuse and overdose deaths
- Around 2010, following tighter regulations on prescription opioids, addicted individuals turned to more accessible heroin, causing a sharp rise in heroin-related overdose deaths

Fentanyl remains the major driver of the opioid crisis, implicated in the majority of overdose deaths

- Starting in 2013, the crisis intensified with the emergence of synthetic opioids, particularly illicitly manufactured fentanyl, causing a significant increase in overdose deaths
- More than 450,000 Americans have died of drug overdose since a national public health emergency was declared in 2017
- Two thirds of overdose deaths are now attributable to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids

Opioid-related deaths are skyrocketing affecting younger Americans, with no corresponding increase in drug-seeking behavior, indicating growing risks for the “opioid naïve”

- Overdose is now the leading cause of death among those aged 18 to 49
- Fatal overdoses among adolescents, 14- to 18-year-olds, jumped an alarming 94% in 2020 (versus 29.5% for the overall population) and a further 20% (versus 11.5% for the overall population) in 2021

Medications such as naloxone and buprenorphine have proven to be useful tools in addressing the opioid crisis

- The wider availability of naloxone has undoubtedly saved numerous lives in recent years, but its usage may simultaneously obscure the full extent of the opioid crisis, as death totals could underrepresent the number of opioid overdoses occurring
- Despite recent regulatory changes aimed at expanding access to buprenorphine, data show that actual prescriptions of the medication have not increased significantly