

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

***Updated May 12, 2022**

The nation's drug overdose epidemic continues to change and become worse. The epidemic affects every state and now is driven by illicit fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, methamphetamine, and cocaine, often in combination or in adulterated forms. More than 107,000 deaths were [reported](#) in the United States between December 2020 to December 2021. 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 and reports 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:

- [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 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on February 10, 2022, released a draft revision to its 2016 opioid prescribing guideline. In comments to the Federal Register on April 11, 2022, [the AMA said](#) that the CDC's new draft guideline—if followed by policymakers, health insurance companies and pharmacy chains—provides a path to remove arbitrary prescribing thresholds, restore balance and support comprehensive, compassionate care.
- [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](#). Reduce barriers to medications to treat substance use disorders; broaden access to a wide range of harm reduction services, including naloxone, sterile needle and syringe exchange services, and drug checking supplies; require all health insurance programs to remove arbitrary restrictions for care for patients with pain; and take steps to develop and support a national, standardized reporting system for key metrics related to drug use. July 2021.
- [Recommendations from the AMA Substance Use and Pain Care Task Force](#) and [AMA 2021 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. September 2021
- 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.

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National reports

(State-by-state reports begin on page 7 below)

- **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-8cb302a70ddb6a435f9e8fbb19f153b> May 11, 2022 (AMA statement: <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-statement-overdose-deaths-reaching-over-100000-past-year>)
- **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
- **Drug overdose deaths are at a record high. Here's what the White House plans to do.**
<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/21/1093974276/drug-overdose-deaths-opioid-fentanyl> April 21, 2022
- **Has the Pendulum Swung Too Far Against the Use of Opioids?**
<https://www.managedhealthcareexecutive.com/view/the-time-is-now-for-laboratory-benefit-management> April 20, 2022
- **Covid-19: US sees increase in sexually transmitted diseases and teen drug overdose deaths.** <https://www.bmj.com/content/377/bmj.o991> April 19, 2022
- **Treatment for opioid addiction often brings discrimination.**
<https://www.wiznews.com/2022/04/16/treatment-for-opioid-addiction-often-brings-discrimination/> April 16, 2022
- **Teen drug overdose deaths rose sharply in 2020, driven by fentanyl-laced pills.**
<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/04/12/1092309418/teen-drug-overdose-deaths-rose-sharply-in-2020-driven-by-fentanyl-laced-pills> April 12, 2022
- **Treatment for Opioid Addiction Often Brings Discrimination.**
<https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2022-04-09/treatment-for-opioid-addiction-often-brings-discrimination> April 9, 2022
- **US: Discrimination based on opioid treatment violates law.**
<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/us-discrimination-based-opioid-treatment-violates-law-83890876> April 5, 2022
- **Filling opioid prescriptions akin to a Sisyphean task.**
<https://www.mdedge.com/hematology-oncology/article/252575/opioid-resource-center/filling-opioid-prescriptions-akin> March 8, 2022
- **What the Opioid Crisis Took From People in Pain.**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/opinion/opioid-crisis-pain-victims.html> March 7, 2022
- **We Need Better Conversations About Drug Use In The Black Community.**
<https://www.essence.com/news/drug-use-euphoria-biden-administration/> February 23, 2022
- **Teenage Fentanyl Deaths Are Soaring, and Black Teens Are Hit Hardest.**
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-11/teenage-fentanyl-deaths-are-soaring-and-black-teens-are-hit-hardest> February 11, 2022
- **Study shows that states need more naloxone.**
<https://www.boston25news.com/news/massachusetts/study-shows-that-states-need-more-naloxone/KRKTTO4Z5REFLJWJUI3FOHNGB4/> February 10, 2022
- **Overdose deaths cost US \$1 trillion annually, bipartisan report finds.**
<https://abcnews.go.com/amp/Politics/overdose-deaths-cost-us-trillion-annually-bipartisan-report/story?id=82726941> February 8, 2022
- **Overdose Deaths Caused by Opioids in Combination with Stimulants Hit Black Communities Hardest.** <https://nyulangone.org/news/overdose-deaths-caused-opioids->

- [combination-stimulants-hit-black-communities-hardest](#) February 8, 2022
- **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-tren> February 7, 2022
- **Economic Toll Of Opioid Epidemic: \$1.3 Trillion A Year.** <https://www.forbes.com/sites/katiejennings/2022/02/04/economic-toll-of-opioid-epidemic-13-trillion-a-year/?sh=43bdf2f62792> February 4, 2022
- **Surging Racial Disparities in the U.S. Overdose Crisis.** <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2021.21040381> February 2, 2022
- **The fight to legalize life-saving fentanyl test strips in Southern states.** <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/the-fight-to-legalize-life-saving-fentanyl-test-strips-in-southern-states/> January 31, 2022
- **Overdose deaths hit a historic high in 2020. Frustrated experts say these strategies could save lives.** <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/overdose-deaths-hit-a-historic-high-in-2020-frustrated-experts-say-these-strategies-could-save-lives> January 13, 2022
- **The future of Overdose Prevention Centers—With two U.S. centers now open, will the Biden administration intervene or look away?** <https://www.medpagetoday.com/psychiatry/addictions/96468> January 1, 2022
- **Making Addiction Treatment More Realistic And Pragmatic: The Perfect Should Not Be The Enemy Of The Good.** <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20211221.691862> January 3, 2022
- **To save lives, overdose antidote should be sold over-the-counter, advocates argue.** <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/12/14/1063865914/to-save-lives-overdose-antidote-should-be-sold-over-the-counter-advocates-argue> December 14, 2021
- **Fed up with baby steps amid ‘tsunami of overdose death’.** <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/11/mgh-expert-responds-to-100000-overdose-deaths/> November 29, 2021
- **Buprenorphine Misuse: What’s the Reality?** https://www.medpagetoday.com/opinion/second-opinions/95753?xid=nl_secondopinion_2021-11-21&eun=g1622575d0r November 18, 2021
- **Opinion: U.S. overdose deaths are soaring. Biden’s new plan could help ease the crisis.** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/11/09/us-overdose-deaths-are-soaring-bidens-new-plan-could-help-ease-crisis/> November 9, 2021
- **As overdose deaths soar, DEA-wary pharmacies shy from dispensing addiction medication.** <https://www.healthleadersmedia.com/clinical-care/overdose-deaths-soar-dea-wary-pharmacies-shy-dispensing-addiction-medication> November 9, 2021
- **The Biden team is scrambling to slow a crushing wave of drug overdose deaths.** <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/27/1049245787/biden-hhs-tackle-drug-overdose-deaths> October 27, 2021
- **Overdose deaths are so high that the Biden team is embracing ideas once seen as taboo.** <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/27/1049245787/biden-hhs-tackle-drug-overdose-deaths> October 27, 2021
- **US Overdose Deaths Surge to an All-Time High.** <https://news.wttw.com/2021/10/25/us-overdose-deaths-surge-all-time-high> October 25, 2021
- **The U.S. Fentanyl Crisis: What to Know.** <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/us-fentanyl-crisis-what-know> October 20, 2021
- **Price for drug that reverses opioid overdoses soars amid record deaths.** <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/19/naloxone-price-soars-opioid-overdoses> October 19, 2021

- **Fentanyl is one reason why the U.S. drug addiction crisis is roaring back.** <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/19/1047223109/fentanyl-is-one-reason-why-the-u-s-drug-addiction-crisis-is-roaring-back> October 19, 2021
- **Drug users face obstacles and mistrust when it comes to getting COVID vaccine.** <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/03/1042802584/drug-users-face-obstacles-and-mistrust-when-it-comes-to-getting-covid-vaccine> October 3, 2021
- **DEA Safety Alert: Sharp Increase in Fake Prescription Pills Containing Fentanyl and Meth. DEA Warns that International and Domestic Criminal Drug Networks are Flooding the United States with Lethal Counterfeit Pills.** <https://www.dea.gov/alert/sharp-increase-fake-prescription-pills-containing-fentanyl-and-meth> September 27, 2021
- **Black Opioid Deaths Increase Faster Than Whites, Spurring Calls For Treatment Equity.** <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/09/10/1035445899/black-opioid-overdose-deaths-increasing-faster-than-whites-study-finds> September 10, 2021
- **Pregnant and Postpartum People Continue to Encounter Barriers to Opioid Use Disorder Treatment.** <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2021/09/09/pregnant-and-postpartum-people-continue-to-encounter-barriers-to-opioid-use-disorder-treatment> September 9, 2021
- **AMA statement on International Overdose Awareness Day.** <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/ama-statements/ama-statement-international-overdose-awareness-day> August 31, 2021
- **The High Price of the Opioid Crisis, 2021.** <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/data-visualizations/2021/the-high-price-of-the-opioid-crisis-2021> August 27, 2021
- **Patients on high doses of opioid analgesics risk overdose when tapering study finds.** <https://www.pharmacist.com/Pharmacy-News/patients-on-high-doses-of-opioid-analgesics-risk-overdose-when-tapering-study-finds> August 26, 2021
- **As opioid epidemic rages, an overdose antidote is in short supply; Pfizer says manufacturing issue led to problems producing injectable Narcan.** <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/08/02/metro/opioid-epidemic-rages-an-overdose-antidote-is-short-supply-ri/> August 2, 2021
- **How drug warriors made the ‘opioid epidemic’ deadlier.** <https://chicago.suntimes.com/columnists/2021/7/28/22597967/opioid-epidemic-pain-management-war-drugs-jacob-sullum> July 28, 2021
- **How can the U.S. reduce drug overdose deaths? A wide range of ideas awaits Biden.** https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/biden-opioid-overdose-deaths/2021/07/17/0af03c3e-e63e-11eb-8aa5-5662858b696e_story.html July 19, 2021
- **Drug overdose deaths in 2020 hit highest number ever recorded, CDC data shows.** <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/14/health/drug-overdose-deaths-2020/index.html> July 17, 2021
- **Overdose Deaths in State Prisons Have Jumped Dramatically Since 2001.** <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/15/1015447281/overdose-deaths-state-prisons-increase> July 15, 2021
- **In pandemic, drug overdose deaths soar among Black Americans.** <https://apnews.com/article/george-floyd-michael-brown-pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-race-and-ethnicity-ea94f4021018bfc7bc88e7b494c8665e> June 24, 2021
- **The Opioid Crackdown is Hurting People in Pain.** <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2021/06/15/the-opioid-crackdown-is-hurting-people-in-pain/> June 15, 2021
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- **Study: 1 in 5 Pharmacies Blocks Access to Addiction Treatment Buprenorphine.**
<https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/study-1-in-5-pharmacies-blocks-access-to-addiction-treatment-buprenorphine> May 3, 2021
- **One in five pharmacies blocks access to key medication to treat addiction.**
<https://news.ohsu.edu/2021/04/26/one-in-five-pharmacies-blocks-access-to-key-medication-to-treat-addiction> April 26, 2021
- **Overdose Deaths Surged in Pandemic, As More Drugs Were Laced With Fentanyl.**
<https://www.delawarepublic.org/post/overdose-deaths-surged-pandemic-more-drugs-were-laced-fentanyl> April 22, 2021
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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/07/health-202-overdose-deaths-may-have-topped-90000-2020/> April 7, 2021
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- **Latinos grapple with opioid overdose rise as pandemic triggers surge in U.S. use.**
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latinos-grapple-opioid-overdose-rise-covid-pandemic-triggers-surge-us-rcna415> March 17, 2021
- **House reshapes approach to mental health and addiction.**
<https://www.rollcall.com/2021/03/16/house-reshapes-approach-to-mental-health-and-addiction/> March 16, 2021
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<https://news.bloomberglaw.com/health-law-and-business/in-birth-and-death-opioid-crisis-to-leave-mark-long-after-covid> February 25, 2021
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<https://www.npr.org/2021/02/15/963700736/as-addiction-deaths-surge-profit-driven-rehab-industry-faces-severe-ethical-crisis> February 15, 2021
- **As Overdose Deaths Surge, White House Takes Steps To Build Drug Policy Team.**
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- **81,230 overdoses set record for such deaths in a 12-month period, CDC says.**
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State reports

1. Alabama

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