

Press Release

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Bigger Problems than Opioids, Our Nation's Livelihood**

Opioids are the substances directly killing people, but they are a symptom of a larger social and economic issue facing communities most affected by the opioid epidemic. A recent U.S. News Commentary discusses how rates of drug addiction and overdose are much higher in some areas than others. The physiological processes of addiction may not discriminate, but the conditions that place people at risk of addiction and overdose are more prevalent in some places than others.

It is estimated that over the past 10 years, there were over 40,000 excess drug deaths among counties ranked in the top 25 percent of economic distress. The implication is that these deaths likely would not have occurred had these counties had similar economic conditions of those in the bottom 25 percent of economic distress- meaning community-level social infrastructure, such as the presence of churches and other religious venues, that serve as protective factors against high drug overdose rates.

CDC data shows that, in addition to access to opioids, there are three main groups of factors that explain why fatal drug overdose rates are higher in some places than others: economy/work, family and community. Counties characterized by higher rates of poverty, joblessness, disability, single parent families and divorce/separation in 2000 have much higher rates of drug mortality now, nearly two decades later, even among places with similar access to opioids. What these three factors have in common is meaning to our lives. Lack of connection to jobs, family and community is a common sentiment among many who struggle with opioid addiction. The counties that had a lack of churches, open venues for distressed individuals and protective places against high drug overdose rates all are what differentiates the areas with higher overdose rates than others. If an individual feels connected to their environment or are able to have a sense of belonging provides them a natural endorphin increase, as it also gives opportunities for them to utilize their time in work, home and social outings in a more positive way, in hopes they lean toward making more positive choices.

Some experts have argued that the U.S. overdose crisis has been driven almost entirely by the surge in prescription opioids. As a result Purdue Pharma and the other pharmaceutical companies who manufactured and aggressively marketed OxyContin and other opioids are being sued and it is no coincidence that pharmaceutical companies targeted, and widespread opioid prescribing first emerged in, the most economically vulnerable places in the U.S., particularly those with high rates of poverty, joblessness, pain and disability.

OxyContin and other strong opioids were heavily marketed in mining-dependent Appalachian communities long before they spread across the rest of the U.S. Of the 100 counties with the highest fatal drug overdose rates in the U.S., 80 of them are within the heart of Appalachia (West

Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee) or the former U.S. industrial belt (Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana). What these places have in common is sustained devastation to their blue-collar industries, intergenerational poverty and little opportunity for upward mobility.

This current opioid situation is extremely difficult to maintain as seen for decades now, but the ongoing discussion of how prescription opioids have increased the amount of deaths with this overdose epidemic trickles into the bigger problem of our nation, the foundations that are the bones of this large structure -the social and economic conditions as individuals interact within their community. Once people start looking to the real source of the problem; their choices, the number of safe havens in a community, promotions of affordable counseling/ support and easy access of it for individuals to receive before they lose hope, will have more of a positive impact against this epidemic.

US News U.S. News & World Report is an American media company that publishes news, opinion, consumer advice, rankings, and analysis. To read the full article please visit <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2019-02-26/commentary-social-and-economic-factors-are-driving-the-us-drug-crisis>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal agency that conducts and supports health promotion, prevention and preparedness activities in the United States, with the goal of improving overall public health. To learn more about the CDC please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org)