

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Opioid Epidemic- Still Here and Getting Worse**

According to a recent article in The Washington Post, the nation is still grappling with the deadly coronavirus pandemic, yet unfortunately it is far from the nation's only public health crisis. The opioid addiction epidemic that was already raging before March 2020 appears to be getting worse, in part because hardships and isolation stress brought on by COVID-19 and the subsequent economic shutdown are adding to mental health strains.

Whereas annual drug overdose deaths in the United States had hovered around 70,000 from 2017 through 2019, evidence suggests that they accelerated last year. Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that there were 90,237 drug-overdose deaths in the 12 months ending in September 2020, a leading indicator that implies a substantial increase over 2019's total of 70,630, when final figures for all of 2020 are in. Seventy percent of drug overdose deaths are opioid-related, according to the most recent CDC figures.

Federal, State and local governments must do everything possible to prevent further backsliding. This is a tall order as the nature of the epidemic constantly mutates even as officials try to address it. Prescription drugs such as oxycodone were responsible for the first wave of deaths this century; then came a follow-on epidemic of heroin in the 21st century's second decade. Recent data now indicate that the death toll from those substances has stopped increasing, but that this is offset by a spike in deaths from synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. Fentanyl probably accounted for the surge last year, along with more modest upticks in methamphetamine- and cocaine-related deaths.

President Biden recently decided to support extension through this year of an emergency law, that makes it easier for law enforcement to target traffickers of fentanyl "analogues," rather than seek special drug-by-drug authority to take on each of these chemically similar substances. Given the role that international smuggling from China and Mexico plays on the supply side of this drug.

A wide spectrum of opinions recognizes that ending the epidemic means reducing demand and, over time, calls for expanding access to treatment and to mental health care more generally. President Biden included \$1.5 billion for treatment of substance use disorders in his American Rescue Plan and advocated, in his fiscal 2022 budget proposal, \$10.7 billion for research, prevention, treatment and recovery support services, \$3.9 billion over the 2021 level.

This is a first installment on the \$125 billion, 10-year commitment he proposed in the 2020 campaign. The next urgent task is to fill out the executive branch team to carry out this strategy. So far, President Biden has named former New Jersey attorney general Anne Milgram to be the new head of the Drug Enforcement Administration. The appointments of Directors of two other key players - the Food and Drug Administration and the Office of National Drug Control Policy has yet to transpire.

The Washington Post is a major American daily newspaper published in Washington, D.C. It has taken a leadership role in following the Nations opioid epidemic. Please visit The Post's Opioid Files for more information at [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

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).