

Press Release

January 3, 2022

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Overdose Deaths Surged Over 100,000 in 2021

For the first time drug overdose deaths exceeded 100,000 in the 12-month period ending in April 2021. The numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics, show a new record of predicted deaths that came amid Covid-19. The provisional number was a 28.5 percent increase from the 78,000 deaths in the prior year, with 75 percent of overdose deaths caused by opioids, mostly of the synthetic variety. As of early December, the predicted number of deaths for the 12-month period ending in May 2021 was slightly lower, but still above the 100,000 mark. The number of reported deaths was slightly under 100,000 for both periods of time, but according to the NCHS, these numbers were underreported due to incomplete data.

The 12-month period between May 2020 and April 2021 coincided with the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, a time which saw more people lose access to treatment as well as an increase in patients reporting mental health issues. A separate report released in July found that life expectancy in the United States had decreased in the single largest one-year drop since World War II, a decline fueled by the combination of Covid-19 and deaths from accidents or unintentional injuries, one-third of which were drug overdoses. (Data released in December confirmed the decrease in life expectancy of 1.8 years between 2019 and 2020, with coronavirus replacing deaths from unintentional injuries as the third leading cause of death in 2020.)

Prior to the arrival of Covid-19, the opioid crisis was well underway with opioid deaths increasing by 200 percent between 2000 and 2014; a brief decrease in deaths in 2018 was offset by a surge the following year. The data released by the CDC showed that there were more overdose deaths from synthetic opioids than there were overdose deaths from all drugs in 2016.

West Virginia had the highest rate of deaths, with the District of Columbia coming in second. Although Vermont had a comparatively smaller quantity of deaths, it had the biggest increase in overdose deaths at 70 percent, with West Virginia clocking in behind it.

According to Dr. Andrew Kolodny, the medical director of the Opioid Policy Research Collaborative at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management, most people who died due to overdoses were addicted to opiates and that the devastation of addiction had been exacerbated by the pressures of the pandemic. In the early weeks of the pandemic, the stress of isolation and the potential loss of support offered by 12-step programs could have encouraged relapses among people who were in remission; moreover, it may have been more difficult for people still in the throes of addiction to receive necessary treatment.

Congress made efforts to address the opioid crisis. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, which was signed by President Biden includes an amendment to identify countries that are major producers or distributors of illicit fentanyl and withhold some foreign aid unless they classify the drug and crack down on traffickers within their borders. Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Republican Senator Rob Portman of Ohio, each representing a state which the opioid crisis has hit disproportionately hard, also recently reintroduced a bipartisan bill this year to permanently "schedule," or classify, illicit fentanyl, allowing federal law enforcement to bring action against drug manufacturers and distributors. Additionally, the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency Act was reintroduced, which would provide \$125 billion over 10 years to address substance use, with targeted funding for states, cities, and counties, as well as money for research and training.

Congress has yet to fulfill appropriations measures, due to varying ideas over how certain programs should be funded. The president's budget request included nearly \$11 billion in funding to address the crisis, and the Senate appropriations bills introduced this year included a \$500 million increase for State Opioid Response Grants. In October, the House passed a bipartisan bill reauthorizing the State Opioid Response Grants, but it has not yet been considered in the Senate.

The White House has also introduced a law for states to expand access to naloxone, which can be used to counteract the effects of an opioid overdose. However, expanding access does not address the root of the problem-addiction which can be a preventable and treatable condition thus necessitating new funding streams, or at least a commitment to long-term funding. Researchers maintain without additional funding for treatment, the opioid crisis will only worsen. This does not just mean additional rehab beds, but long-term outpatient programs with access to treatments like buprenorphine, which is prescribed to combat opioid use disorder. Medical practitioners currently still need federal permission to prescribe buprenorphine, limiting the number of physicians who can provide it.

Members of Congress have introduced a bipartisan bill to remove the requirement to seek permission in order to prescribe buprenorphine, but it has not yet been acted upon and also have recently introduced legislation that would address the underlying cause of the crisis, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, or CARA, 3.0. Congress passed CARA in 2016 and legislation including several provisions from CARA 2.0 in 2018. The new legislation includes policy changes and an additional \$785 million in funding for prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

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.

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 or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org.