

Iowa Department of Public Health  
Division of Behavioral Health/Bureau of Substance Abuse  
Opioid Update: December 2021

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) offers the Opioid Update to share information about opioid use and Iowa's efforts to address the national opioid epidemic. Please feel free to submit topics to RaChel Greenwood at [rachel.greenwood@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:rachel.greenwood@idph.iowa.gov).

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**Opioid News**

**Dramatic increase in U.S. drug overdose deaths**

According to recent provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were an estimated 100,306 drug overdose deaths in the 12-month period ending in April 2021. This is an increase of 28.5% (in comparison, Iowa experienced a 9.5 percent increase) from the 78,056 deaths during the same period the year before. The primary cause for this increase were synthetic opioids like illicit fentanyl, which were involved in over 64,000 of the predicted number of deaths during the 12-month period.

To add to the concern, synthetic opioids like illicit fentanyl are showing up in other unexpected substances. While there has been an increase in deaths involving methamphetamines and opioids together, a recent notice from Connecticut identified several overdose incidents where naloxone was required for revival of individuals who reported only using marijuana. Laboratory tests later confirmed that marijuana obtained from one of the overdose scenes tested positive for fentanyl.

IDPH encourages individuals that if you are going to use substances that may contain illicit opioids, *do not use alone* and *have Narcan available*. Using in the presence of someone else that is able to offer assistance by administering Narcan in the event of a suspected overdose can be the difference between life and death. And for those individuals who are contemplating getting help with their usage, assistance is always available by contacting Your Life Iowa at [yourlifeiowa.org](http://yourlifeiowa.org) or calling 855-581-8111.

To view the CDC data, please click on this link: [CDC](#)

**The impact of relaxation of methadone take-home protocols on treatment outcomes in the COVID-19 era**

Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) with methadone, buprenorphine or naltrexone is considered the standard of care for the treatment of opioid use disorder (OUD). Current MOUD prescription regulations require methadone to be prescribed and administered at federally certified opioid treatment programs (OTP) which patients are required to attend nearly daily for methadone administration. In March of 2020 as part of a COVID-19 exemption, OTPs were given permission to provide up to 28-days of take-home doses to stable clients and up to 12-days of take-home doses to less stable clients.

This study examined methadone treatment outcomes after the COVID-19 exemption and found that the increase in the number of take-home doses of methadone was not associated with poorer treatment outcomes in the post COVID-19 exemption period.

To read this article, please click this link: [AJDAA](#)

### **White House Releases State Model Law to Help Make Access to Naloxone Consistent Across the Country**

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) recently announced the release of a model law for states to help expand access to naloxone, which has been proven to save lives by reversing opioid overdoses. The Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association (LAPPA)'s *Model Expanded Access to Emergency Opioid Antagonists Act* provides state officials with the means to increase the ability of their citizens to access and use life-saving emergency opioid antagonists.

To read the White House's press release on this model law, please click this link: [WHSML](#)

To read the full model law, please click on this link: [LAPPA](#)

## **Resources**

### **Federal Overdose Prevention Strategy**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently released a national strategy that promotes groundbreaking research and evidence-informed methods to improve the health and safety of our community. The strategy is grounded by the principles of equity; data and evidence; coordination, collaboration and integration; and stigma reduction. It is focused around the four main priorities of: primary prevention, harm reduction, evidence-based treatment, and recovery support, and it expands the scope of the crisis response beyond opioids to include other substances involved in overdoses, such as methamphetamines and cocaine.

To access the Federal Overdose Prevention Strategy, please click this link: [OPS](#)

### **Whole-Person Care for People Experiencing Homelessness and Opioid Use Disorder Toolkit: Part I**

The *Whole-Person Care for People Experiencing Homelessness and Opioid Use Disorder Toolkit* provides a framework for supporting recovery and housing stability. Part I of the toolkit provides an introduction to homelessness, opioid use disorder, and evidence-based recovery practices such as trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, eliminating stigma, and harm reduction. An English language version of this toolkit was released in August 2021. The Spanish language version of this toolkit was released in November 2021.

To obtain a copy of this toolkit in English, please click this link: [PRIE](#)

To obtain a copy of this toolkit in Spanish, please click this link: [PRIS](#)