

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

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National

[Drug Overdoses Killed a Record Number of Americans in 2020, Jumping by Nearly 30%](#)

NPR

More than 93,000 people died of a drug overdose in the U.S. last year — a record number that reflects a rise of nearly 30% from 2019, according to new data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Officials said the increase was driven by [the lethal prevalence of fentanyl](#) as well as pandemic-related stressors and problems in accessing care.

“This is the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period and the largest increase since at least 1999,” Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, told NPR.

The data is provisional, as states are still reporting their tallies to the CDC’s [National Center for Health Statistics](#). But even with some data not yet complete, the numbers tell a dire story.

National

[Opioid Treatment Programs: A Key Treatment System Component](#)

Pew Trusts

The most effective treatments for opioid use disorder (OUD) are the three prescription medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) — methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone — that are proved to increase a patient’s treatment retention and reduce illicit use and the risk of overdose.¹ The only facilities legally able to offer all three medications are opioid treatment programs (OTPs), a critical component of the U.S. substance use treatment system that are regulated by the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), as well as state agencies, and are certified to administer any FDA-approved medication for the treatment of OUD.² As of March 2021, there were 1,816 OTPs in the United States, and in March 2019, the last year for which data is available, approximately 409,000 patients were receiving methadone treatment at OTPs — the only health care setting where this medication can currently be accessed.³

Iowa[Linn County's Drug Treatment Court utilizes medication to fight opioid addictions](#)

KTVO

Linn County is one of few Iowa counties with a specialized drug treatment court. Judge Fae Hoover has been with the program since it was established in Cedar Rapids in 2007. “Drug Treatment Court is a way to deal with realities of our society in terms of substance use and mental health issues and be their best,” said Judge Hoover. The Drug Treatment Court is a program designed to keep people on probation and who suffer from substance abuse out of prison. Candidates are interviewed for the program. “There is a limit of who is able to come into the program and certainly that epidemic has [affected] all walks of life,” said Judge Hoover. The program allows those in Drug Treatment Court to participate in either residential or outpatient treatment. There is also a mental health component with offering opportunities for therapy.

Massachusetts[Study shows MISSION wraparound services boost outcomes for drug court clients](#)

UMass

An evidence-based wraparound service model that reduces barriers to care was shown to enhance drug treatment courts’ effectiveness in improving criminal justice and behavioral health outcomes among participants with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, according to a pilot study led by UMass Medical School researchers.

The study by UMass Medical School authors Paige M. Shaffer, MPH, instructor in psychiatry; Camilo Posada Rodriguez, clinical research assistant; Ayorkor Gaba, PsyD, assistant professor of psychiatry; Jennifer Harter, PhD, senior project director; and David Smelson, PsyD, professor of psychiatry; with collaborators from Boston University School of Social Work and Massachusetts Executive Office of the Trial Court, was published in April in [*International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*](#).

Maine[At Summit, Maine Officials Say They’re Redoubling Efforts to Control Drug Overdoses](#)

Maine Public Media

[Governor Janet] Mills recently signed several bills into law to address overdose deaths. One establishes an Accidental Drug Overdose Death Review Panel to help develop strategies to prevent future fatalities. The state has also increased the availability of Medication Assisted Treatment to people who are incarcerated. It’s trained more than 500 recovery coaches, and more than 130 are actively working with people recovering from addiction. But Gov. Janet Mills says the state still has a long way to go.

“The increase in overdose deaths during the coronavirus pandemic is concrete evidence that we have to do more,” Mills said. “We cannot rest until we deliver on our promise to attack this deadly and destructive disease and root it out.”

South Dakota

[Addiction care in South Dakota is insufficient, experts say](#)

Aberdeen News

Even with medication-assisted treatment available in the state, advocates say addiction care is still insufficient in South Dakota.

“South Dakota is kind of behind in its addiction care,” said Dr. James Wilde, who leads the Center for Family Medicine addiction care team. “They don’t treat the underlying reason for why people overdose.”

Medication-assisted treatment was made more available last year during the pandemic when the Drug Enforcement Administration allowed providers to prescribe the medications to patients virtually. Normally, patients must be seen in person before being prescribed one of the medications to treat opioid addiction.

That flexibility will likely end when the State of Emergency surrounding the pandemic ends, reinstating a geographic hurdle for addiction patients in rural South Dakota, where care was and is still not as widely available.