

Opioid Awareness Fact Sheet

What You Need To Know

General Opioid Information

The misuse of and addiction to opiates including heroin and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl is a continued issue for individuals, families, communities, and systems of care in the United States.¹ Starting in the 1990s, opioid medications were prescribed at higher rates as medical professionals were led to believe they were not addictive, leading to a pervasive opioid crisis of widespread misuse of both prescription and non-prescription opioids.² While medical providers have since learned about the addictive properties of opioids and limited prescribing of opioid medication, the nation has been struggling to address the issues for over a decade. In 2013, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared the misuse of prescription opioids an epidemic. In 2017, HHS declared the U.S. was facing a public health emergency as a result of the opioid crisis. This declaration has been renewed annually since then.³

Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) is defined by the Center for Disease Control as a “problematic pattern of opioid use that causes significant impairment or distress”.⁴ OUD has affected approximately 9.4 million adults or 3.7% of the U.S. population in 2022.⁵

The issue is pervasive for families throughout the U.S. The 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) report states that approximately 5.4 million adults 18 and older had an opioid use disorder in the past year.⁶ The chronic nature of addiction and the high rates of relapse can lead to instability in children's lives, with consequences that may extend into adulthood. Parental opioid use can also increase a youth's access to these drugs, leading to accidental poisoning. Additionally, the opioid epidemic has contributed to the increase in the number of children in foster care. Children of mothers who used opioids tend to remain in foster care longer, compared to children of mothers who used alcohol, methamphetamines, or cannabis.⁷

Furthermore, not only are youth having difficulty due to parents having a Substance Use Disorder (SUD) but they themselves can be dealing with an active SUD. The 2023 NSDUH report states that 2.2 million youth aged 12 to 17 had a substance use disorder in 2023. It also reported that 316,000 youth aged 12 to 17 had an opioid use disorder.⁸

Opioid-Related Demographic Facts

Researchers found that opioid-involved mortality was higher among individuals who were:⁹

- Ages 18–59
- Disabled
- Had less education
- Had criminal justice involvement
- Unemployed
- Low income
- Did not have health insurance

Research also shows that the following social factors play a role for those across various identity groups and value systems that are vulnerable to SUD.¹⁰

Did you know?

Of the **51,435** reported overdose deaths in 2022, **81.8%** were opioid-related.¹¹

An average of nearly **295** people per day died of a drug overdose in 2021. Approximately **66%** of these deaths were related to opioids.¹²

Policy and Law

Three significant laws aimed to reduce the demand, supply, and harm associated with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) were enacted between 2016 and 2018. Overall, \$8.1 billion from 2017 to 2023 have been delegated to these.

[The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act \(CARA\) of 2016](#)

The goal of CARA is not to remove children or punish mothers for substance use, but to ensure child safety and address the health and substance use disorder treatment needs of both the affected infant, family or caregiver.

[The 21st Century Cures Act](#)

This is a broad grant in place to help cure 21st century diseases. In context with opioids, the act will provide states with money to develop their own opioid response program.

[The Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment \(SUPPORT\) for Patients and Communities Act](#)

These expanded Medicaid provisions allow young adults involved in the criminal justice or foster care systems to retain Medicaid coverage and access services, which include treatments for OUD. Additionally, it established a demonstration project aimed at increasing the capacity of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) providers.

Opioids and Family Courts

While it is certain that the opioid epidemic has had a significant impact on the juvenile and family justice system, there is little to no data to determine the extent of the impact. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) 2022 data reported that parental drug abuse was associated with the removal of a child in 33% of cases. Additionally, 6% of cases where a child was removed involved parental alcohol abuse as a circumstance on the case.¹³

The HHS also supported research exploring the effects of the opioid epidemic on the child welfare system and published a report in 2018. The authors looked at quantitative and qualitative factors to examine how the community and child welfare system interact while an increasing population of families are affected by substance use. The following are some key takeaways from the article:¹⁴

- ▶ Agencies from communities affected most from the opioid epidemic reported that “family members across multiple generations are more frequently using substances themselves, making substitute caregivers within the family more difficult to find and causing the child welfare system to more frequently take and retain custody of children.”
- ▶ Community resources are limited in these areas as they are more strained during the epidemic. Community programs and facilities, hospitals, schools and others are all strained.
- ▶ “Higher indicators of substance use predict a greater proportion of children with maltreatment reports that are removed from their homes.”

Juvenile and family courts working with children and families impacted by the opioid epidemic can adopt trauma responsive approaches and harm reduction practices to help ensure services are more effective and promote better outcomes.

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