

Opioids & the Justice System



Timeline:

1898: Bayer commercially produces Heroin as a less addictive alternative to morphine.¹

Early 1990s: American Pain Society and The Joint Commission decry under-treatment of pain.²

1999: First wave of the opioid epidemic begins with increased overdose deaths involving prescription opioids.⁴

2010: New prescription guidelines go into effect. Second wave of the opioid epidemic begins with increased overdose deaths involving heroin.⁴

2017: The opioid epidemic is declared a national public health emergency.⁵

1924: Anti-Heroin Act bans production and sale of heroin in the US.¹

1995: OxyContin, a slow-release "safer and less addictive" opioid painkiller is introduced and aggressively marketed by Purdue Pharma.³

2007: Purdue Pharma pleads guilty for misleadingly advertising Oxycontin and pays \$634 million fine, and later reformulates OxyContin to have a lower risk of addiction.³

2013: Third wave of the opioid epidemic begins with a rapid increase in overdose deaths involving fentanyl (50x more potent than heroin).⁴

2018: Preliminary CDC data show opioid overdoses decreased by 5% since 2017. But deaths from synthetic opioids continue to rise.⁶



130+

Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.⁷

400,000

Americans died from an overdose involving any opioid (prescription and illicit) between 1999 - 2017. **68%** of all overdoses in 2017 involved opioids.



255 million

Opioid prescriptions were dispensed in 2012, a peak rate of **81.3 prescriptions per 100** people.⁸

~80%

Of people who use heroin first misused prescription opioids. An estimated **21 - 29%** of patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain misuse them.⁹



2.1 million

People in the US had an opioid use disorder (OUD) related to prescription opioid pain medication.⁵ **652,000** had an OUD related to heroin in 2016.⁹

17.5%

Of people with in the US with an OUD related to prescription opioid pain medication received specialized treatment in 2016.⁹



Justice System Solutions



65%

Of the 2.3 million people in jail or prison meet the DSM-IV medical criteria for substance abuse. But only **11%** of all inmates receive any treatment during their incarceration.¹⁰ **77%** of formerly incarcerated people with an OUD relapse to opioid use within 3 months of their release.¹¹

Many people with an OUD come into contact with the justice system -- whether incarcerated directly due to drug use, or indirectly struggling with legal issues related to child custody, housing, access to healthcare, and employment. This presents a unique opportunity for public defender offices, civil legal aid, and the courts to address the opioid crisis by reducing barriers to treatment and connecting those with OUD to appropriate services.



Education

Education about the science behind opioid use can counteract common misconceptions, especially around medication-assisted treatment.



Partnerships

Legal partnerships with holistic support services (e.g., hospitals, community centers) can help address the needs of individuals with OUD and their families.



Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)

MAT combines behavioral therapy and medication to combat opioid addiction. But because of barriers to receiving treatment, many people cannot access it.



Address Social Determinants of Health

Access to housing, food, transportation, employment, healthcare, and social services are essential to long-term treatment and stability.

Endnotes:

1. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1953-01-01_2_page004.html
2. https://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/6/Pain_Std_History_Web_Version_05122017.pdf
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2622774/>
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>
5. <https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/about-the-epidemic/index.html>

6. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6834a2.htm?s_cid=mm6834a2_w
7. <https://www.hrsa.gov/opioids>
8. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/maps/rxrate-maps.html>
9. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis>
10. <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/newsroom/press-releases/2010-behind-bars-ii>
11. <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/pep19-matbriefcjs.pdf>