



## September Newsletter

### Facts, Not Fear. The Truth About Fentanyl.

In early August, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department released body camera footage purporting to show an officer overdosing from simply touching fentanyl. The department suggested the incident was a cautionary tale about just how potent fentanyl can be; however, it is not possible to overdose on fentanyl through skin contact or from close proximity alone.

"Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues do not readily cross the skin barrier and do not aerosolize well. The only way to overdose on these substances is from injecting, snorting, or otherwise ingesting them," said Dr. Ryan Marino, MD Medical Toxicologist, Addiction Medicine Specialist and Emergency Physician Assistant Professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, "or in the case of the fentanyl patch, from mixing with an absorbable solvent and applying very large quantities for very long durations of time."

Misinformation around fentanyl fuels the stigma faced by people with substance use disorders, hinders appropriate responses, and has been used to increase the criminalization of vulnerable groups.

"It is unconscionable and completely irresponsible for law enforcement organizations to continue fabricating false narratives around fentanyl. Content like this simply creates more fear and irrational panic that fuels further punitive responses to the overdose crisis, instead of the public health approach we need. We already know how this story goes, because we experienced it in the 80's and 90's with crack-cocaine. Law enforcement-driven, media-perpetuated hysteria inevitably leads to extreme racially-biased enforcement and mandatory minimum sentencing," said [Kassandra Frederique](#), DPA's executive director.

"We call on media to think twice about amplifying these harmful narratives that have devastated Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities over the last 50 years and led to more dire public health and societal consequences as a result. We would encourage media to engage more public health experts who can actually speak to

the science and solutions, rather than law enforcement, when covering public health crises such as these. And we urge Congress to swiftly pass the [S.T.O.P. Fentanyl Act](#), so we can begin saving lives.”

Fentanyl (or other opioid) overdoses can be reversed with [naloxone, an FDA-approved medication that works to reverse an opioid overdose](#) by restoring breath to unconscious overdose victims. Naloxone is not psychoactive, has no potential for misuse, and side effects are rare.

[Learn more about fentanyl](#)

## Take Action: End the Overdose Crisis

August 31 was International Overdose Awareness Day, and we at the Drug Policy Alliance paid tribute to the many lives lost. Last year, drug overdose deaths in the U.S. increased by more than 30%, killing more than 94,000 people – the highest ever on record.

The criminalization of drugs is driving the overdose crisis. It wastes resources on arrest, incarceration, and punishment instead of supporting harm reduction and other health services that are proven to save lives. Criminalization also pushes people into risky situations, dissuades people from seeking support, and prevents people from being aware of the contents and purity of the drugs they use.

Overdose is preventable only if drug use is treated as a health issue instead of a crime.

To help end the overdose crisis, we must decriminalize drugs and invest in health services to give people who use drugs the support and dignity they deserve.

Join us in demanding change. **Urge President Biden to stop doubling down on drug enforcement and pursue health-based solutions to overdose.**

***Take Action Now***

## DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

## FEATURED POST: WHY SHOULD WE END THE WAR ON DRUGS?



Last weekend, people at the National Cannabis Festival in Washington, D.C. told us why the war on drugs needs to end. Swipe through [our Instagram post](#) to discover some of their reasons.

***Follow DPA on Instagram.***

## **NYC Marijuana Arrests Have Plummeted Since Public Consumption Was Made Legal**

The number of marijuana-related arrests and summonses have dropped in New York City since the state legalized the drug in March, new data shows. Between the first and second quarters of 2021, marijuana possession arrests decreased from 163 to 8. Marijuana-related summonses plummeted from 3,687 to 8.

These figures are indicative of a seismic shift in the city's approach to marijuana. A decade ago, New York City was the marijuana arrest capital of the world – with more than 51,000 such arrests in 2011 alone.

As a result of DPA's committed and long-standing advocacy, New York passed the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act on March 31, establishing one of the most ambitious marijuana legalization programs in the nation. The passage of the legislation immediately ended penalties for the public possession of up to three ounces of marijuana and for public consumption.

Ending the criminalization of public consumption was a crucial component of the legislation that DPA fought for, to ensure that reform would be rooted in racial and economic justice.

In comparison, the decline in marijuana arrests has been less significant in jurisdictions that legalized marijuana but retained penalties for public consumption. In Chicago, for example, there were nearly 3,000 marijuana-related arrests in 2020, of which around three-quarters were of Black people. In Denver, [public consumption and display arrests soared](#) from 8 in 2014 to 891 in 2016.

[Learn more.](#)

## Pop Culture's Obsession with Addiction

Pop culture has the power to shape our beliefs, for better or worse. Now, as the United States grapples with an increasingly deadly overdose crisis, TV and streaming shows are representing overdose and substance use disorder as central plot lines. But are they getting it right or doing more harm than good?

To answer this question, Jake Samieske, a digital communications intern at DPA, did some binge watching and detective work. He reviewed recent hits *BoJack Horseman*, *Feel Good*, and *Shameless* to examine how they portray substance use and harm reduction themes.

[\*\*Read Jake's blog post.\*\*](#)

## Drug Policy in the News

***Marijuana Moment:*** Top Federal Drug Official Admits Legalizers Were 'Right' About Teen Marijuana Use And Touts Psychedelics' Therapeutic Potential

**Washington Post:** My 12-Year-Old Brother's Death Was Used to Sell The 'War on Drugs.' It's Time for Biden To End It.

**The Nation:** We Should Hand Out Free Heroin to Drug Users

**Riverhead News Review:** Lawmakers Say 'Death By Dealer' Legislation Will Lower Overdoses; Advocates Disagree

**Los Angeles Times:** How Misinformation About Fentanyl Can Be Deadly

**NY Daily News:** To Honor Overdose Victims, End the Drug War

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