

Stop the Opioid Crisis Epidemic

The “opioid crisis” – deaths from opioid overdoses – persists and is worsening, and it is no longer mostly about prescription opioids. Illicitly made and sold fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid, is the main culprit.¹ Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine;² just one fentanyl-laced pill can kill someone.

As illicit-fentanyl-related opioid deaths have risen dramatically, valid opioid prescriptions have dropped by more than 50% nationwide over the past decade,³ and in Texas are even lower than the national average.⁴ However, now many Texas patients cannot get proper, medically indicated prescriptions for pain management. Stricter prescribing regulations and enforcement have become barriers to pain relief. Some patients discover their physician declines to prescribe opioids; others cannot find a new physician to treat their chronic pain; and many surgeons, emergency physicians, and others refer patients to pain management specialists rather than prescribe the drugs.

As a result, some suffering patients who cannot get a prescription for chronic pain turn elsewhere for relief. They may acquire illegal opioids – which often contain fentanyl – or even commit suicide to escape their pain. Texans with opioid use disorders also are unwittingly taking illicit drugs laced with fentanyl and dying.

TMA's Legislative Recommendations

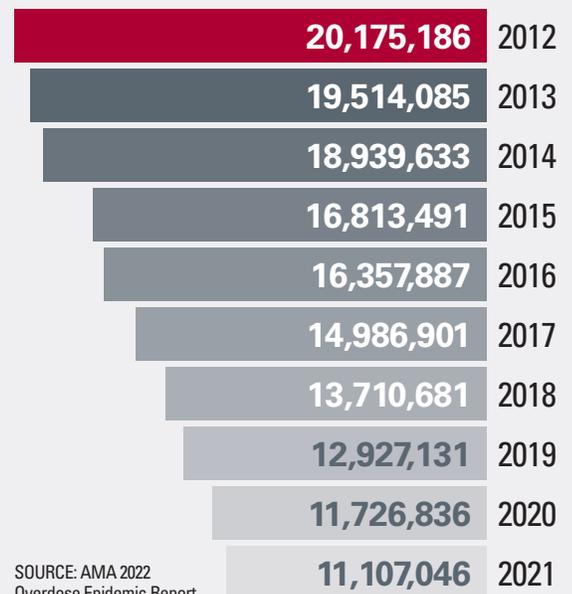
- Revisit current laws on certification of both pain management clinics and non-pain management clinics.
- Improve the state prescription monitoring program (PMP), and resume integration of the PMP with physicians' electronic health records.
- Reduce the chance of overdoses by making the opioid antidote naloxone available and accessible over the counter and by legalizing fentanyl test strips to help identify the presence of fentanyl in medications.
- Improve data collection to identify who is at risk for, and to fully understand, polysubstance drug use, and implement public health interventions.
- Educate the public about the serious side effects – including death – from overdoses of illegal fentanyl-laced opioids and similar illegal medications.

In 2020, 883 people in Texas died from fentanyl-related overdoses.

In 2021, that number climbed to 1,672 deaths – an 89% increase.

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services 2020 provisional data

Opioid prescriptions in Texas, 2012-21



SOURCE: AMA 2022 Overdose Epidemic Report



Physicians Caring for Texans

[texmed.org/Legislature](https://www.texmed.org/Legislature)

1 CDC. Fentanyl. (accessed Dec. 15, 2022).

2 CDC. Fentanyl Facts (accessed Dec. 15, 2022).

3 Larry Aubry and B. Thomas Carr. Overdose, opioid treatment admissions and prescription opioid pain reliever relationships: United States, 2010-2019. *Frontiers in Pain Research*. Aug. 4, 2022. See also: 2022 Overdose Epidemic Report. American Medical Association. 2022.

4.2. Legislative Budget Board Staff Report – ID: 4830 (2019), page 2.