

## The Opioid Crisis in the Era of Fake News

Minnesota  
Health Strategy and Communication Network  
November 3, 2017

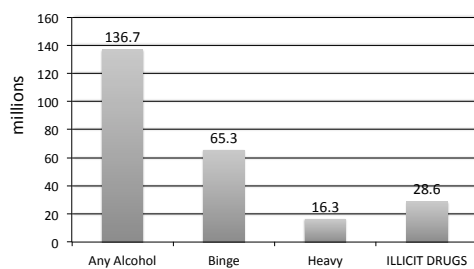
Carol Falkowski  
CEO, Drug Abuse Dialogues  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
[www.drugabusedialogues.com](http://www.drugabusedialogues.com)

### Why?

To feel good.

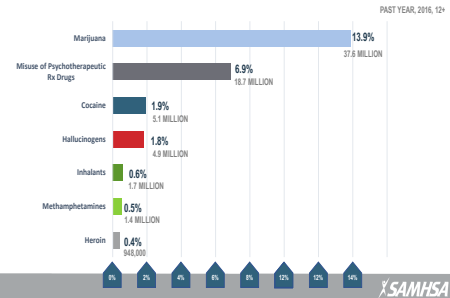
To feel better.

Past month substance use: US 2016  
(age 12 and older)



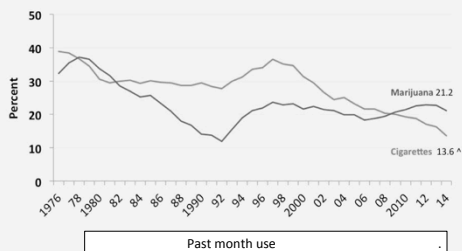
SOURCE: 2016 NSDUH, SAMHSA

Past Year Use of Selected Drugs: US 2016



SOURCE: NSDUH 2016, SAMHSA

### More kids smoke MJ than cigarettes



Source: University of Michigan, 2014 Monitoring the Future Study

## Medical marijuana

29 states and Washington D.C.

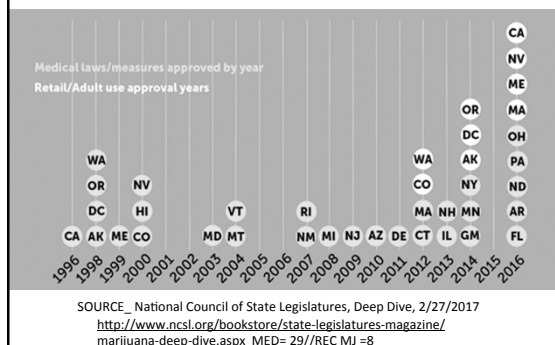


## Legal recreational marijuana

Colorado  
Washington  
Oregon  
Alaska  
Washington D.C.

California  
Massachusetts  
Nevada  
Maine

### STATE MARIJUANA POLICIES TIMELINE



**60% of Americans think MJ should be legalized**

SOURCE: Gallup Poll, 2016.

Synthetic drugs

### Dangerous strain of synthetic marijuana raising alarm in St. Paul

By Mara H Gottfried, Pioneer Press

May 8, 2017

<http://www.twincities.com/2017/05/08/st-paul-emergency-calls-spike-as-synthetic-marijuana-makes-users-pass-out-throw-up-become-catatonic/>

Over and over again, St. Paul paramedics and EMTs have responded recently to people having bad reactions after apparently smoking synthetic marijuana. Some have been unconscious, some vomiting and others in a catatonic state.

The medical calls keeping the fire department busy are happening in the downtown area where many homeless people get services.

The fire department, whose paramedics and emergency medical technicians provide emergency medical services in the city, responded to 56 calls in the area of West Seventh and Fifth Street and Old Sixth Street in a 14-day period ending last Thursday, said Matt Simpson, assistant fire chief of EMS operations.

### At least 60 overdosed on synthetic marijuana last week in Minneapolis

It's the biggest toll since 2015, said one official, and left users with hallucinations, violent behavior, or nearly comatose.

By Libor Jany, Star Tribune  
October 9, 2017

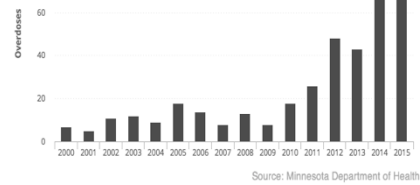
Online at: <http://www.startribune.com/hcmc-at-least-60-overdoses-on-synthetic-marijuana-last-week/450132573/>

### Selected synthetic drug exposures: 2010 – 2016 Minnesota

	THC homologs	Bath Salts	2CE analogues	MDMA	LSD
2010	28	5	10	26	9
2011	149	144	23	24	7
2012	157	87	24	19	15
2013	110	50	35	19	45
2014	102	21	15	65	31
2015	223	20	5	19	39
2016	83	7	1	10	44

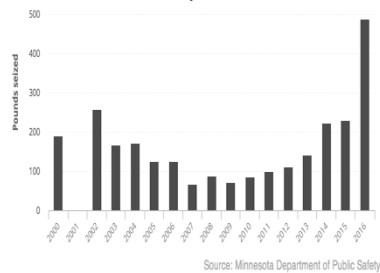
SOURCE: Minnesota Poison Control System, Hennepin County Medical Center, 2017.

### METH overdose deaths



SOURCE: <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/06/while-minnesota-authorities-focus-opioid-abuse-meth-making-comeback>

### METH seizures by law enforcement



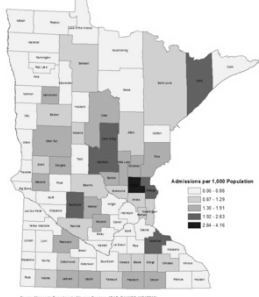
SOURCE: <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/06/while-minnesota-authorities-focus-opioid-abuse-meth-making-comeback>

### METH treatment admissions



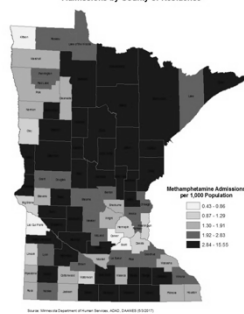
SOURCE: <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/06/while-minnesota-authorities-focus-opioid-abuse-meth-making-comeback>

CY2007 Methamphetamine SUD Treatment Admissions  
by County of Residence



2007

CY2016 Methamphetamine Substance Use Disorder Treatment  
Admissions by County of Residence



2016

**20.1 million people** (aged 12 or older) had a  
**substance use disorder (SUD)** in the past year in 2016

SOURCE: 2016 NSDUH, SAMHSA.

## Most addiction goes untreated

In 2014, 22.5 million people in the U.S. needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problems but only 18 percent received any treatment, far below treatment receipt rates for those with hypertension (77 percent), diabetes (73 percent), or major depression (71 percent).

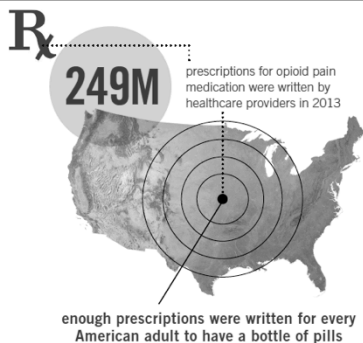
**AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, 2017:**  
<https://www.acponline.org/acp-newsroom/acp-issues-recommendations-to-prevent-and-treat-substance-use-disorders>

## 'Drugged driving' surpasses drunken driving among drivers killed in crashes, report finds

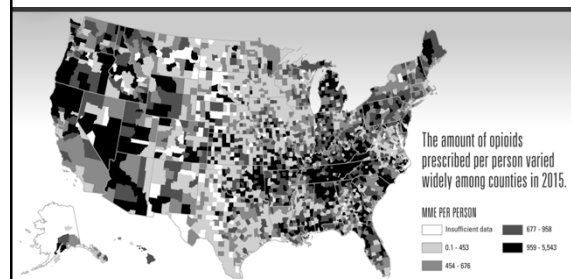
Of those tested, 43% of motorists who died had drugs in their system, the report said. This number surpassed the 37% of motorists who died who tested positive for alcohol in the same year (2015).

SOURCE: Governors Highway Safety Association and the Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility, April 28, 2017.  
[http://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2017-04/GHSA\\_DruggedDriving2017\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2017-04/GHSA_DruggedDriving2017_FINAL.pdf)

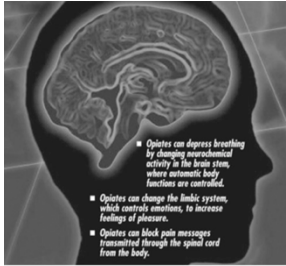
## Opioids



<sup>1</sup> Includes overdose deaths related to methadone but does not include overdose deaths related to other synthetic prescription opioids such as fentanyl.  
<sup>2</sup> National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2014



SOURCE: CDC, Vital Signs, 2017



■ Opiates can depress breathing by changing neurochemical activity in the brain stem, where automatic body functions are controlled.

■ Opiates can change the limbic system, which controls emotions, to increase feelings of pleasure.

■ Opiates can block pain messages transmitted through the spinal cord from the body.

■ potential

■ High overdose potential

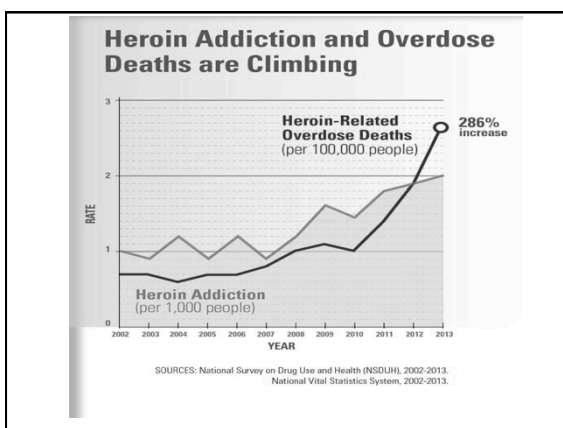
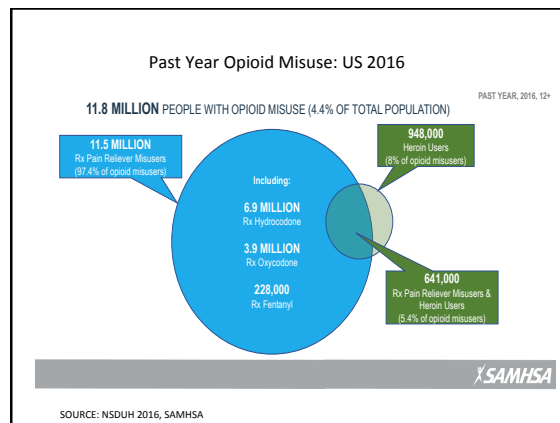
■ Feel good

■ Block pain

■ Depress breathing

**OXYCONTIN (OXYCODONE)**

**HEROIN**



**DRUG DEATHS IN AMERICA ARE RISING FASTER THAN EVER**


New York Times  
June 5, 2017

[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/05/upshot/opioid-epidemic-drug-overdose-deaths-are-rising-faster-than-ever.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/05/upshot/opioid-epidemic-drug-overdose-deaths-are-rising-faster-than-ever.html?_r=0)

**Drug crisis is pushing up death rates for almost all groups of Americans**

The Washington Post  
June 9, 2017

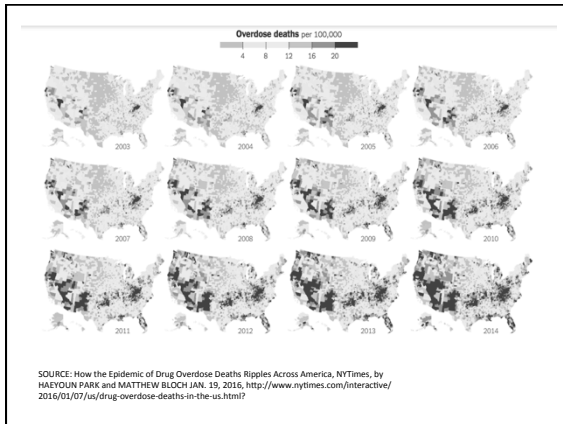
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/the-drug-crisis-is-now-pushing-up-death-rates-for-almost-all-groups-of-americans/2017/06/09/971d8424-4aa1-11e7-a186-60c031eab644\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.eaa9b07534cc](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/the-drug-crisis-is-now-pushing-up-death-rates-for-almost-all-groups-of-americans/2017/06/09/971d8424-4aa1-11e7-a186-60c031eab644_story.html?utm_term=.eaa9b07534cc)



**165K**

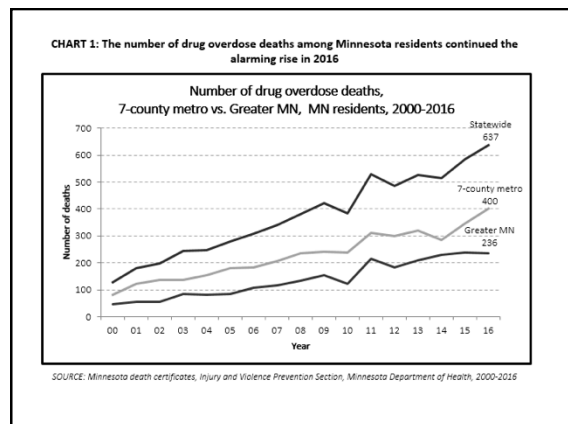
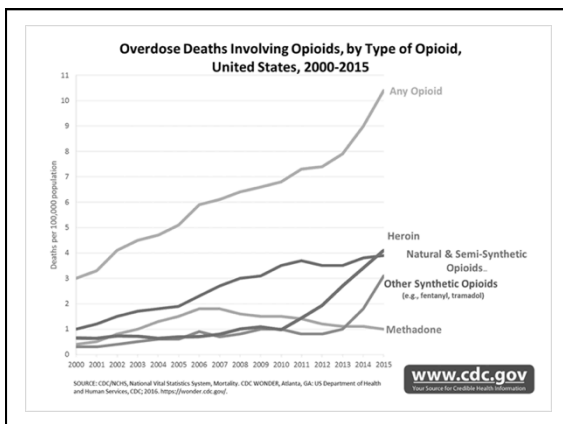
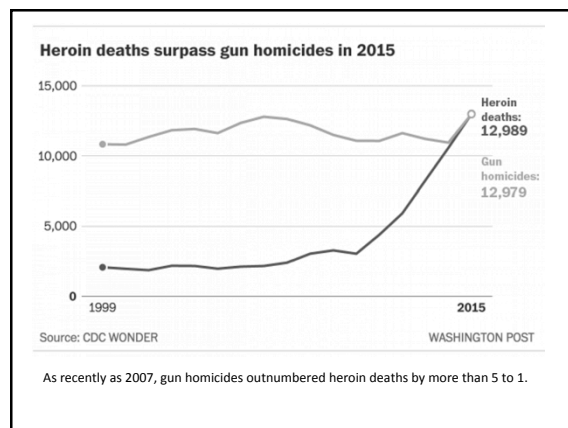
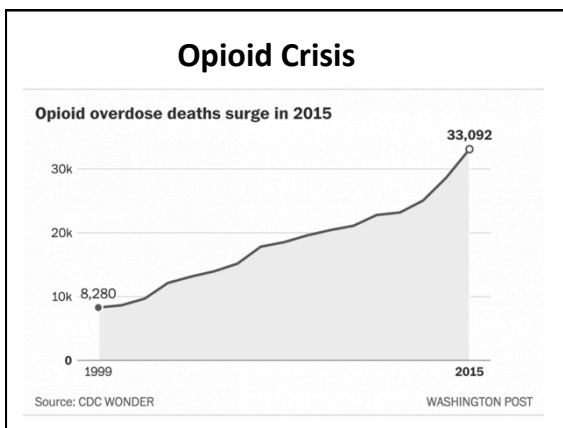
Since 1999, there have been over 165,000 deaths from overdose related to prescription opioids.<sup>1</sup>

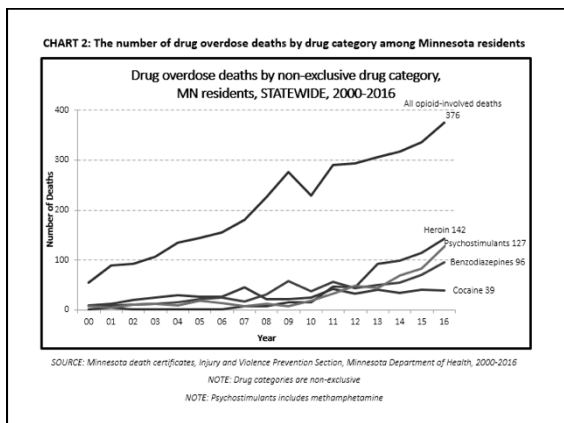
[https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines\\_at-a-glance-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines_at-a-glance-a.pdf)



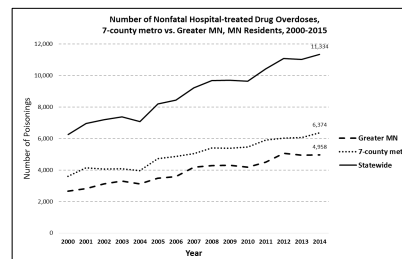
**Heroin deaths surpass traffic deaths and most recently surpass gun homicides for the first time, CDC data shows.**

SOURCE: CDC





## Hospital Drug Overdoses Follow Same Trend as Drug Overdose Deaths



## Rx Opioid Abuse

How'd we get here?



- Awash in pills
- DTC advertising of Rx drugs
- Inadequate medical education about addiction, pain management, and opioids
- Pain added as 5<sup>th</sup> vital sign
- Consumer satisfaction surveys
- Deceptive marketing practices of pharmaceutical companies

## The letter in a 1980 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine



Vol. 302 No. 2

CORRESPONDENCE

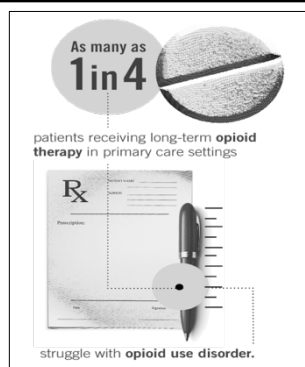
### ADDICTION RARE IN PATIENTS TREATED WITH NARCOTICS

*To the Editor:* Recently, we examined our current files to determine the incidence of narcotic addiction in 39,946 hospitalized medical patients<sup>1</sup> who were monitored consecutively. Although there were 11,882 patients who received at least one narcotic preparation, there were only four cases of reasonably well documented addiction in patients who had no history of addiction. The addiction was considered major in only one instance. The drugs implicated were meperidine in two patients,<sup>2</sup> Percodan in one, and hydromorphone in one. We conclude that despite widespread use of narcotic drugs in hospitals, the development of addiction is rare in medical patients with no history of addiction.

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[https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines\\_at-a-glance-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines_at-a-glance-a.pdf)



## Synthetic fentanyl and counterfeit pills

Reports of counterfeit Rx drugs in the US and Canada include OxyContin® tablets, Percocet® tablets, Xanax® tablets, and Norco® tablets.

These tablets often contain a synthetic opioid different from what the substance user believes is present.

Novel synthetic opioids that have been found are often **fentanyl and fentanyl analogues**. **Carfentanil** (large animal tranquilizer)

**Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues** also found in street drugs: heroin, cocaine, meth

## Counterfeit pills are the next wild card in the opioid deck

By Carol Falkowski

Russian roulette is defined as "an act of bravado consisting of spinning the cylinder of a revolver loaded with one cartridge, pointing the muzzle at one's own head, and pulling the trigger" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). After one player pulls the trigger, the gun is passed to the next player and the cylinder spun again. So it goes until the chamber with the bullet in it discharges. Game over.

Russian roulette is a game of chance with a lethal outcome. The same is true of drug abuse in America — now more than ever.

Recently, we learned that five deaths in Minnesota in one week were attributed to the ingestion of carfentanil. Authorities disclosed the decedents' histories of opioid addiction, from which we assume that they were seeking opioids, the most commonly abused of which is heroin. But instead of heroin, they encountered a deadly dose of a drug that is 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times more potent than fentanyl. Carfentanil is used by veterinarians to sedate large animals like elephants. It's a very potent, while another produces little effect at all. Sometimes they are repackaged and resold, purported to be other mood-altering substances like LSD.

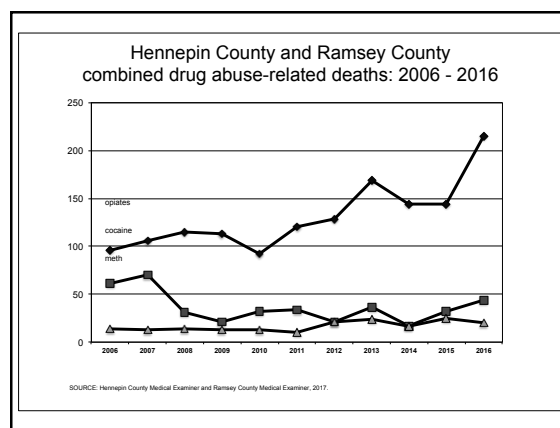
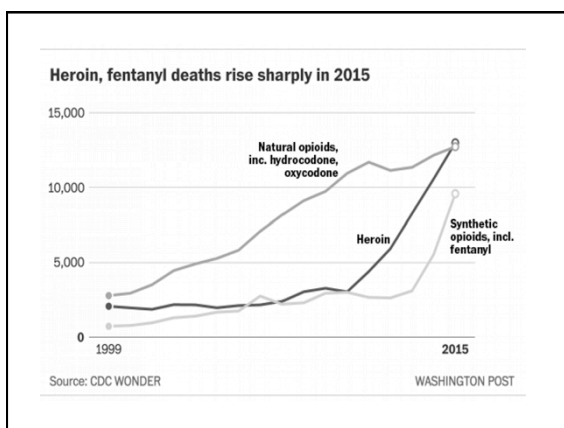
In the wake of the growing use of synthetic substances come accidental overdoses and deaths. Each one is a tragic, new learning opportunity for bereaved families, stunned communities and bewildered schools.

Now in the midst of the burgeoning opioid epidemic, fueled by heroin and prescription pills, counterfeit pills are the next wild card in the opioid deck. Sold in the black market, these "knock-off" pills closely resemble the legitimately prescribed ones, but are clandestinely produced with inconsistent ingredients of varied, sometimes lethal potency. Fentanyl has also been identified in these black market pills, resulting in clusters of overdoses and deaths throughout the country. This phenomenon was implicated in the death of Prince last year.

Pills purchased on the street or online look exactly like the legitimate pills but can be something altogether different. As for street drugs sold as powders, there is no way to ascertain by appearance whether or not they contain fentanyl or the deadlier carfentanil, despite verbal assurances by the seller. Those who sell counterfeit pills or street drugs often possess no specific information about the actual contents of the products they sell.

Now more than ever, when it comes to abuse of illegal drugs, things are not as they seem. The actual composition of drugs or pills — purchased on the street or online — can be something altogether different. As for street drugs sold as powders, there is no way to ascertain by appearance whether or not they contain fentanyl or the deadlier carfentanil, despite verbal assurances by the seller. Those who sell counterfeit pills or street drugs often possess no specific information about the actual contents of the products they sell.

Ellsworth American, 5/4/2017.



Fentanyl toxicity-involved deaths:  
Hennepin County 2016

Drugs of toxicity	Total # of fentanyl deaths = 39
Fentanyl alone	13
Fentanyl and heroin	7
Fentanyl and methamphetamine	4
Fentanyl, heroin, methadone	3
Fentanyl fentanyl	3
Fentanyl and cocaine	2
Fentanyl, heroin, cocaine	2
Fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine	1
Fentanyl, heroin, methadone, methamphetamine	1
Fentanyl and oxycodone	1
Fentanyl and opiate	1
Fentanyl and morphine	1

SOURCE: Hennepin County Medical Examiner, 2017.

Total opiate deaths in 2016 = 153 in Hennepin, 62 in Ramsey County

### Effective medications for opioid use disorders:

- Suboxone
- Methadone
- Extended release naltrexone (vivitrol)

World Health Organization: "essential medicines"  
Reduce craving, withdrawal. Restore balance to brain circuits affected by addiction

**MAT DECREASES:** opioid use, opioid overdose deaths, criminal activity, infectious disease transmission  
**MAT INCREASES:** social functioning, Tx retention

SOURCE: NIDA, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/effective-treatments-opioid-addiction/effective-treatments-opioid-addiction>

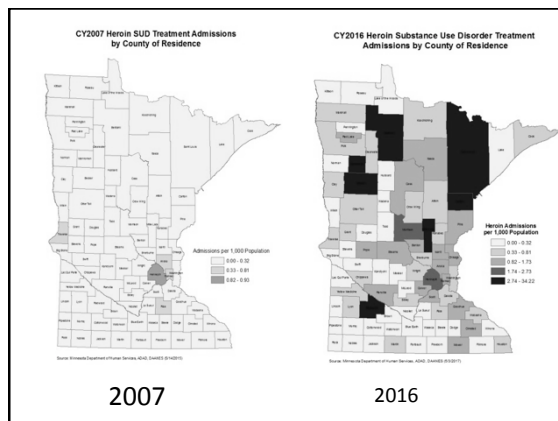


### ***MAT is NOT widely used***

28% of opioid Tx programs in 2012 used medications

35% of opioid Tx programs in 2008 used medications

SOURCE: NIDA, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/effective-treatments-opioid-addiction/effective-treatments-opioid-addiction>



In **2011** the Red Lake Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and the White Earth Band of Chippewa declared **public health emergencies** due to prescription opiate and illegal drug abuse on their reservations.

### **Addressing a drug epidemic:**

- Law enforcement/curtail supply
- Prevention = Same message. Different messengers. Multiple settings.
- Access to evidence-based addiction treatment services

### **Addressing the OPIOID epidemic:**

#### **Changes medical practice:**

- Expand medical education about addiction and pain
- Screen for SUDs
- New pain management tools
- Rx monitoring programs
- Eliminate MD payments tied to patient satisfaction surveys
- Opioid Rxing guidelines
- > Naloxone availability
- Improve opioid addiction treatment

The Stories:



East Liverpool,  
Ohio  
Sept 7, 2016

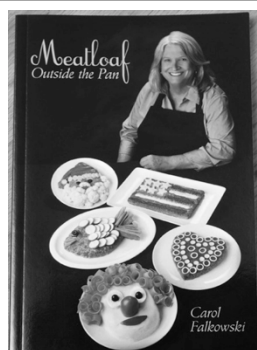


East Liverpool, Ohio  
Sept 7, 2016

## More stories:

- Successful approaches (Little Falls, MN, Kentucky)
- Scope of problem (Washington Post/60 Minutes)
- Community impact (Ohio, WV)
- Orphaned children, generational effects
- Role of contributing factors
- Why no slow down in Rxing and mortality?
- Barriers to change
- If not, why not?
- If not now, when?

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Photos courtesy of [www.outsidethepan.com](http://www.outsidethepan.com)