

OPIOID CRISIS IN HOUSTON

The Problem at Hand:

Within the past 20 years, it has become of prevalent notion that the usage of opioids has plagued the United States. Originally produced to improve patient satisfaction, the disconnection was created between patients and opioids manufactured to manage pain.¹ In current times, the production of such drugs has now become utilized for "recreational" use and now has become an ongoing issue within the country.

In Houston, the illicit drug use has substantially increased and now has become a public emergency in this day and age. As of 2020, Naloxone, a medication used to rapidly reverse opioid overdose, had been administered in Houston for suspected opioid overdose roughly 1,238 times and exactly 490 opioid-related deaths have been disclosed.² Since its development, the rate of utilization of opioids has constantly been climbing and its accessibility to it has become a driving force to the crisis. With that being said, the underlying problem to combat is that current treatment is navigated at the user's accord.

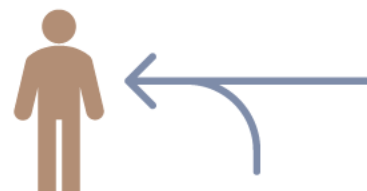
Opioid Settlement Accountable Act:

Establishes requires states to use such funds to address opioid use, such as through:

- 1) Opioid prevention and treatment services
- 2) Health care practitioner training
- 3) First responder equipment
- 4) Social support services.

Forms of Opioids Used:

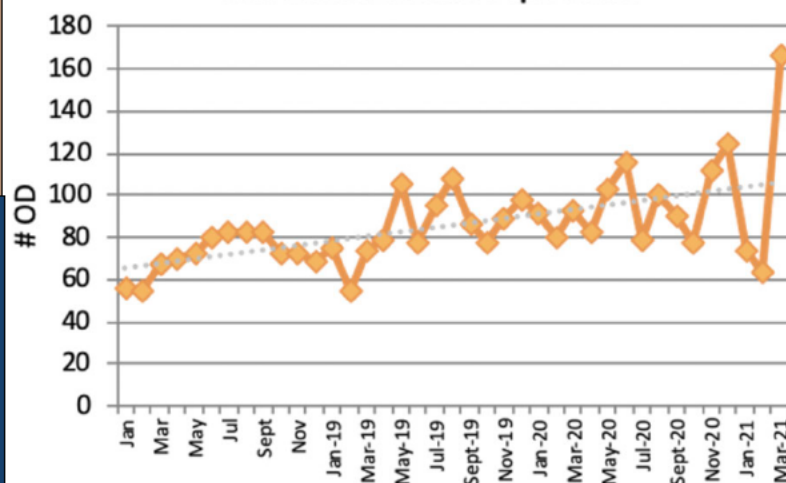
- Fentanyl
- Hydrocodone
- Methamphetamine
- Heroin
- Morphine
- Codeine
- Oxycodone



In Houston, about 1 in every 4 opioid overdoses result with death. An overdose occurs every 32 hours in the Harris County.

Naloxone Reversals by Month

Source: Houston Fire Department



80% of people are left untreated with opioid use disorder.

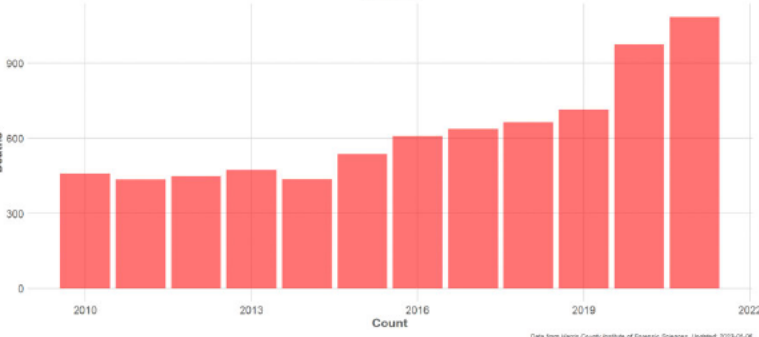
The Stages of the Opioid Crisis:

- 1) Involved deaths caused by prescribed opioids.
- 2) The increase of heroin use
- 3) The surge in the use of synthetic opioids or fentanyl



Harris county averages 1.74 fentanyl deaths in every 100,000 people

Overdose Deaths Over Time in Harris County
2010-2021



Response to the Opioid Crisis:

- Prevention programming brings society to resources across Texas, bringing awareness regarding prescription opioid misuse, distributing the life-saving overdose reversal drug naloxone, and prohibiting substance use disorder before it even begins.
- Integrated services implement prevention, treatment, and recovery strategies in community, clinical, and criminal justice environments to better care for people.
- Treatment grows the limit of physicians and clinics throughout Texas to provide evidence-based solutions to support people who endure opioid and stimulant use disorders.

The Solutions:

- 1) The problem at hand lies in how convenient and accessible it is to obtain opioids. An ongoing bill that has yet to be passed is the legalizing fentanyl test strips as well as introducing syringe-exchange services. In doing this it reduces the death toll in ensuring that victims of said crisis, mitigates the risk of death that has spiked within recent years.
- 2) As Rep. Tom Oliverson has stated, reducing the cost of Narcan could substantially aid this issue as well. Supplying Narcan alone is quite difficult as for a kit with simply just two doses the cost is standing at a whopping \$125. If it is possible for users to obtain opioids with such leniency, it should be just as possible to find accessibility to Narcan to combat the issue at hand.
- 3) Lastly, upholding a stricter accessibility to these opioids needs to be further investigated. Only healthcare workers should be able to allocate these products as well as the paraphernalia that comes with them as well. In order to stop the spread of such a crisis we must be able to look into the root of the problem which is how it's possible to obtain such drugs.

“If you’re out on the street and giving them care packages with Narcan and fentanyl testing strips, that’s an engagement with a health care worker that these people may not [otherwise] be getting,” – Neil Harris

Works Cited:

- Mercadante, Sebastiano. “Houston, we have a problem of opioid crisis... and Rome?” *Journal of Anesthesia, Analgesia and Critical Care*, vol. 3, no. 1, 17 Oct. 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s44158-023-00121-7>.
- “Home.” Public Health, publichealth.harriscountytx.gov/Divisions-Offices/Divisions/Community-Health-Wellness-Division/Substance-Use-Prevention. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.
- School, McGovern Medical. “Opioid Epidemic.” Department of Internal Medicine, 15 Aug. 2023, med.uth.edu/internalmedicine/hptn-094-integra/opioid-epidemic/.
- “Texas Opioid Epidemic.” amfAR, opioid.amfar.org/TX. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.
- H.R.1 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): For the People Act of 2021 ..., www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.
- “Heroes - Home.” Heroes - McWilliams School of Biomedical Informatics at UTHealth Houston, UTHealth Houston, sbmi.uth.edu/heroes/#:~:text=Houston%20sees%20one%20opioid%20related,3%20or%204%20are%20fatal. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.
- Barragáacute;n, James. “Texas GOP Lawmakers Warming to Opioid Harm-Reduction Policies They Once Opposed.” *The Texas Tribune*, The Texas Tribune, 23 Dec. 2022, www.texastribune.org/2022/12/23/tex-harris-county-leads-state-in-fentanyl-deaths-in-2023, Data ..., www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/fentanyl-deaths-harris-county-2023-18338579.php. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.
- ABC News, ABC News Network, abcnews.go.com/Health/opioid-crisis-worse-thought-making-epidemic-harder-fight/story?id=69208304#:~:text=Three%20phases%20of%20the%20opioid%20epidemic&text=The%20first%2C%20involved%20deaths%20caused,of%20synt helic%20opioids%20or%20fentanyl. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.