

Examining Trends of Drug Overdose Deaths 2006-2019

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Deaths due to drug abuse have long been endemic in the United States. The following figure, produced by the National Institutes of Health National Institute on Drug Abuse ¹ shows drug-involved overdose death totals by year from 1999 to 2020. The serious nature of the problem is clearly evident.

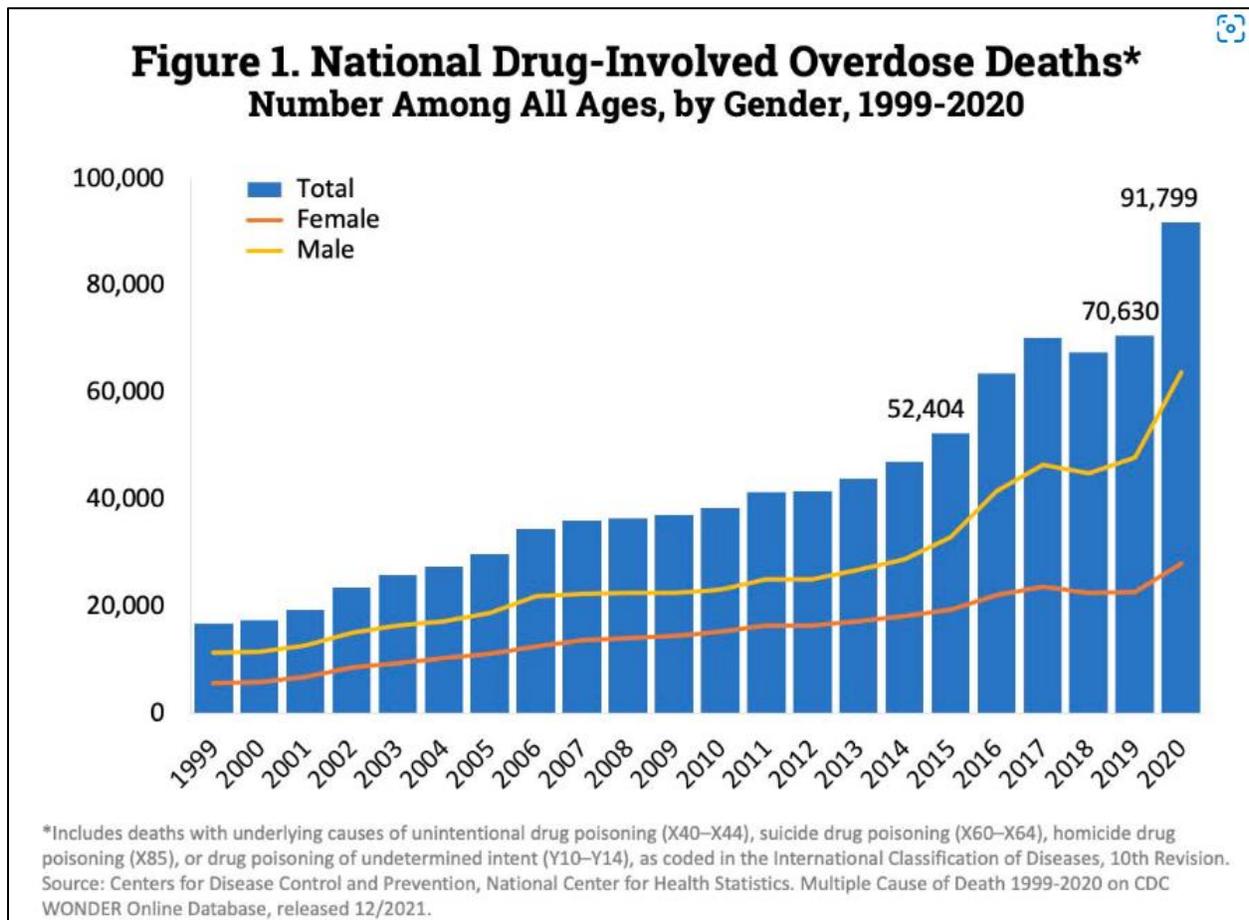


Figure 1 CDC Totals by Year for National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths

What can be done about the problem that continues to steal brothers, sisters, sons and daughters and moms and dads from so many American families? Can anything be done? Let's examine the chart more closely.

The data appears to increase monotonically until 2017, where it appears to level off, until it increases again in 2020. The jump in death rates in 2020 is likely attributable to the negative impacts of COVID-19. In-person counseling and support group meetings were shut down and jobs and income lost through economic hardship led to increased personal stress and drug addiction relapses² and new cases of addiction and subsequent overdoses. In fact, linear regression analysis shows that the average rate of increase of overdose deaths was 17,155 new deaths per year for the ten years leading up to 2017. From

2017 through 2019, the average rate of new deaths per year reduces to 7,038. Statistical significance testing on the two trends show that if the initial rate of increase of deaths were to have prevailed during the years of 2017- 2019, there would be less than a 0.4% likelihood of achieving the reduced average rate of new deaths that did actually occur. Figure 2 is a zoomed in view of the relevant period of Figure 1, with the two different trend lines shown.

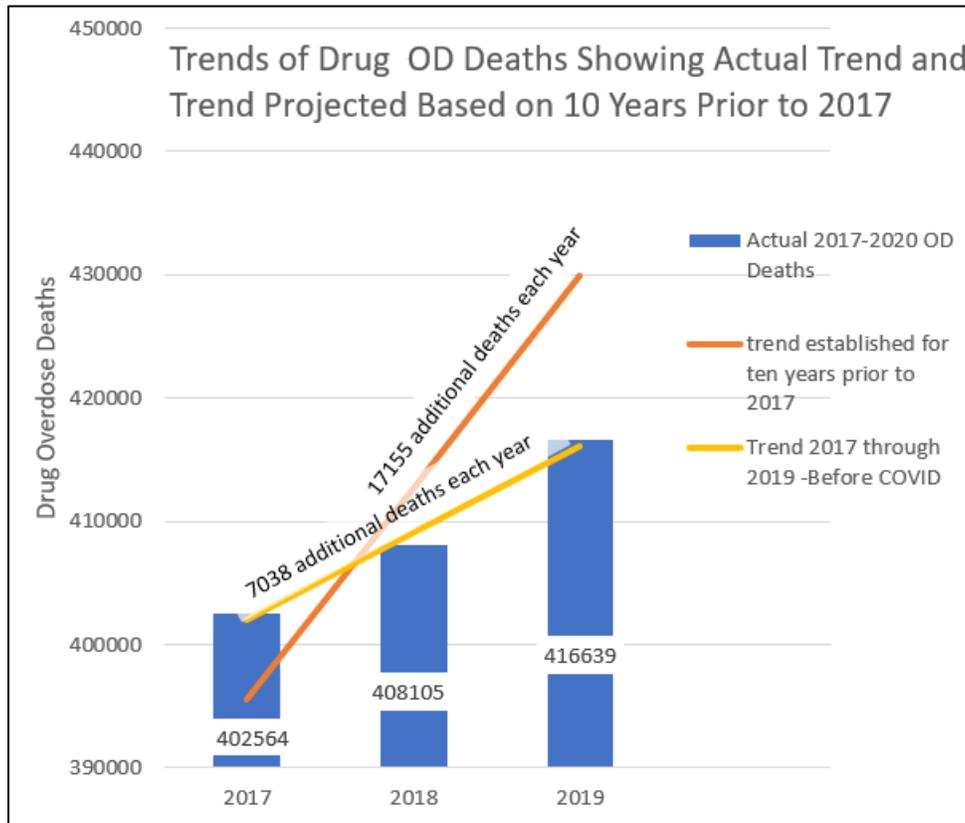


Figure 2 Trend Established Between 2006 and 2016 Extrapolated through 2019 and Actual 2017-2019 Trend Lines

Figure 2 and the statistical evidence support the notion that something happened to affect positive change starting in 2017, continuing through 2019 and ending with the impact of COVID-19. Analysis indicated that we can be more than 99.6% confident that the more favorable trend did not occur by chance. So, what did happen during the period of 2017-2019 that could account for the change?

The changes included the following³:

1. An addition of \$6 billion in new funding over a two-year window to fight opioid abuse was made.
2. The federal government Implemented a “Safer Prescribing Plan” with the objective of reducing opioid prescription fills by 33% within three years.
3. The Administration took a series of aggressive steps to secure our nations borders and ports of entry against the flow of illicit drugs into the country.
4. In 2018, the President worked with Congress to pass, in a bipartisan manner, the largest legislative package addressing a single drug crisis in history. The act was called the SUPPORT Act,

Further, the Administration at the time applied great political and economic (trade) pressure on the Chinese in an attempt to stop trafficking of the deadly drug fentanyl. The result of the pressure was that China placed 1,400 different fentanyl analogues (sometimes referred to as “bath salts”) under state control. ⁴ The Administration worked with the private sector to raise awareness about fentanyl products and they designated some Chinese nationals as drug kingpins for trafficking in the substance. ⁵

The Administration also expanded access to the opioid overdose antidote drug called Naloxone. ⁶

Given the CDC data and the results of the regression analysis, the impact Trump Administration efforts can be quantified in terms of human life. In particular, had the average increase in overdose deaths of the 10 years preceding 2017 been allowed to continue, that rate of death by overdose would account for an estimated 34,310 deaths over the period of 2017 through 2019. Instead, the interventions of the Trump Administration, including the examples referred to in this article resulted limited the increase in deaths to only 14,075 over the base amount for that 3-year period. The difference in these numbers represent an estimate of more than 20,000 lives saved over the course of 3 years by an aggressive anti-drug policy.



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¹ Overdose Death Rates. NIH, National Institute on Drug Abuse. URL: <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>, Accessed: 7/31/2022

² The Impact of COVID-19 on Drug Use—and How It Contributes to Overdose Risk. News Release. NYU. Apr 25, 2022. URL: <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2022/april/covid-19-drug-use.html>. Accessed: 8/6/2022

³ Ending America’s Opioid Crisis. Trump White House Archives. URL: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/opioids/>. Accessed: 7/31/2022

⁴ Jonathan Landay. “Trump accuses China’s Xi of failing to halt fentanyl exports to U.S.”. Yahoo News. 8/1/2019. URL: <https://news.yahoo.com/trump-accuses-chinas-xi-failing-235641280.html>. Accessed: 7/31/2022

⁵ Marisa Schultz. “Trump launches effort against fentanyl trafficking”. NY Post. 8/21/2019. URL: <https://nypost.com/2019/08/21/trump-launches-effort-against-fentanyl-trafficking/>. Accessed: 7/31/2022

⁶ Maegan Vazquez. “What Trump’s drug policies have meant for America’s opioid epidemic”. CNN. 2/2/2020. URL: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/02/politics/opioid-epidemic-donald-trump-drug-policy/index.html>. Accessed: 7/31/2022