



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NORA VARGAS
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

NATHAN FLETCHER
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: December 13, 2022

DRAFT

XX

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

Overdose deaths continue to rise, both nationally and locally, with illicit fentanyl contributing to a large proportion of these deaths. On June 28, 2022 (22), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) voted to declare illicit fentanyl a public health crisis and directed the Chief Administrative Officer to work with the County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency Director to:

- Develop recommendations and an implementation plan to address illicit fentanyl as a public health crisis and return to the Board of Supervisors within 180 days with an update.
- Explore and research funding to be used to support a comprehensive approach to fentanyl misuse prevention and harm reduction efforts, including local efforts to check the local drug supply for the presence of fentanyl and reduce its availability.

Today's update provides a report back on this direction with a request to implement a client-centered, data-driven, public health-oriented approach to service delivery and policy with recommendations adopted from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Health Alert Network Advisory distributed on December 17, 2020, to address the increase in fatal overdoses driven by synthetic opioids. Today's update also includes a report back on October 11, 2022 (11) Board direction calling for additional harm reduction funding for naloxone distribution and training, as well as funding to support implementation of fentanyl awareness in schools.

This item supports the County's vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically left behind, as well as the ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities. Additionally, all recommended actions in the implementation plan align with the County's Comprehensive Harm Reduction Strategy approved by the Board on June 8, 2021 (4) and include the application of evidenced-based approaches aimed at mitigating the risk of overdose and facilitating access to effective harm reduction interventions and treatment.

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Receive an update on Declaring Illicit Fentanyl a Public Health Crisis, inclusive of recommendations and an implementation plan to address the unprecedented increase in fentanyl-related overdoses.
2. [Placeholder] Explore opportunities to increase dedicated resources in support of upcoming workstreams.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County of San Diego (County) is committed to ensuring its diverse communities are healthy, safe, and thriving. Every San Diegan experiences the world differently and has unique circumstances and opportunities that can impact health, lifestyle behaviors, and overall well-being, leading to differences in health outcomes, or health inequities. These health disparities exist among our communities, including when it comes to overdose due to fentanyl. Although fentanyl can impact anyone regardless of age, race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic background, those between the ages of 18-45 years old, as well as Black/African American residents, are disproportionately impacted by fentanyl overdose compared to others. Although White residents account for the majority of fentanyl overdose deaths, Black/African American residents experienced the highest mortality rate in 2021, a 1,143% increase from 2017. Furthermore, it has become the leading cause of death among 18-45 year olds. As a County, it is our responsibility to confront this public health crisis and address existing inequities, advancing the County's vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Update on Declaring Illicit Fentanyl a Public Health Crisis is supportive of the County of San Diego's (County) Sustainability Goal #2 to provide just and equitable access to County services by enhancing the County's overdose data and surveillance infrastructure, allowing the County to more nimbly respond to regional overdose spikes with appropriately disbursed regional prevention efforts. Additionally, the County is ensuring naloxone vending machines are distributed countywide with site placement determined by overdose data and in consultation with community organizations that serve those at high risk for overdose.

Today's item also supports Sustainability Goal #4 to protect the health and wellbeing of everyone in the region, by making a concentrated effort to reach those most at risk of overdose in all activities, specifically through overdose prevention education efforts that increase the public's awareness of changes in the illicit drug supply, risk for overdose, and risk reduction strategies.

FISCAL IMPACT

TBD

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

At their respective meetings on November 1 and November 3, 2022, the Health Services Advisory Board and the Behavioral Health Advisory Board voted to [REDACTED] these recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The current drug overdose crisis is multifaceted and has evolved beyond prescription opioids. Illicit opioids, largely driven by fentanyl and its analogues, have become key contributors. Provisional data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics indicate there were an estimated 107,622 drug overdose deaths in the United States during 2021, an increase of nearly 15% from the 93,655 deaths estimated in 2020. Additionally, the CDC reports that overdose deaths from synthetic opioids (primarily fentanyl), psychostimulants such as methamphetamine, and cocaine continued to increase in 2021 compared to 2022. Furthermore, data from the CDC shows that accidental deaths caused by fentanyl are the number one killer of people between the ages of 18 and 45 years, far exceeding the number of deaths caused by car accidents, COVID, heart disease, and gun violence within this age group.

Based on preliminary 2021 data from the County of San Diego's Medical Examiner Office, from 2016 to 2021 the rate of death among San Diego residents due to all drug overdoses increased significantly by 132%, largely driven by the increase in fentanyl overdoses. From 2019 to 2021 alone, there was a 418% increase in the rate of accidental fentanyl overdose deaths. In 2021, opioids accounted for 71% of all drug overdose deaths, with 743 of the 822 opioid deaths involving fentanyl. This number continues to increase as pending cases are closed.

In an action brought forward by Supervisor Jim Desmond, Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, and District Attorney Summer Stephan on June 28, 2022 (22), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) voted to support the declaration of illicit fentanyl as a public health crisis. The Board further directed the Chief Administrative Officer to work with the County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) Director to:

- Develop recommendations and an implementation plan to address illicit fentanyl as a public health crisis and return to the Board of Supervisors within 180 days with an update.
- Explore and research funding to be used to support a comprehensive approach to fentanyl misuse prevention and harm reduction efforts, including local efforts to check the local drug supply for the presence of fentanyl and reduce its availability.

Following this direction, high-level recommendations and an implementation plan were created to address the unprecedented increase in fentanyl-related overdoses. The Strategies described below are included on Attachment A, with clear Objectives, Activities, and an estimated timeline for implementation.

Strategy A: Conduct Overdose Prevention Education

Education is prevention. Leveraging opportunities to increase awareness about the prevalence and dangers of illicit fentanyl and the availability of naloxone particularly for people who use drugs (PWUD) is crucial in preventing overdose. Prevention efforts that offer education and provide

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

tailored messaging to high-risk groups help people make informed decisions, get the help they need, and ultimately reduce overdose risk. Additionally, academic detailing efforts and trainings that aim to improve opioid prescribing, inform clinical practice, and protect patients at risk help providers provide better care that can result in improved outcomes for patients.

Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) is a CDC grant initiative that supports jurisdictions in collecting high quality, comprehensive, and timely data on nonfatal and fatal overdoses, and funds prevention and response efforts informed by this data. HHS is one of the recipients of the OD2A grant awarded by the CDC and in September 2019, the County launched the multiyear OD2A initiative focusing on strategies and activities aimed at reducing opioid misuse and opioid use disorder and increasing access to evidence-based treatment. Through this work, efforts to advance overdose prevention education have been the focus of *OD2A Strategy 4: Prescription Drug Monitoring Program* and *OD2A Strategy 5: Integration of Local and State Prevention and Response Effort*. Activities under both strategies have led the County's efforts to provide education and training related to overdose risk and prevention and include provider and community education and outreach efforts, curriculum development, and targeted academic detailing.

The Objective within Strategy A prioritizes efforts that increase awareness about the changing illicit drug supply, risks for overdose, and risk reduction strategies, particularly among people who use drugs. By leveraging existing OD2A funding and overdose prevention activities, these efforts will seek to build upon existing messaging to further educate and inform on the dangers of fentanyl. Education efforts will also include information regarding naloxone access and training.

Additionally, in a follow up action brought forward by Supervisor Jim Desmond, Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, and District Attorney Summer Stephan on October 11, 2022 (11), the Board approved recommendations to enhance fentanyl education and strengthen harm reduction efforts for youth, with direction to report-back within 90 days. This Strategy includes the following actions responsive to this direction.

Facilitation of community awareness and education efforts for youth, parents and community coalitions related to substance misuse prevention including illicit fentanyl and overdose death prevention.

Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) activities in San Diego County are countywide and are mainly directed at reducing SUD-related problems experienced by youth between twelve (12) and twenty-five (25) years of age, including sub-groups of adolescents considered to be at high risk for experiencing such problems. Using these funds, the following education and training activities will be conducted:

- Implementation of a Substance Use Prevention and Life Skills curriculum for students in grades 6 and 7. The curriculum is evidence-based (Project Alert) and includes illicit fentanyl prevention messaging. Through a contract with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE), services will include the adaptation of the Project Alert curriculum, which currently targets grades 7 and 8 to include specific content for grade 6.
- Youth-led conversations focused on substance misuse prevention, including illicit fentanyl at schools.

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

- Regional, community-based fentanyl presentations and naloxone training events for parents and community coalitions.
- Harm reduction presentations and exhibitor booths, including educational sessions on illicit fentanyl and naloxone trainings at the 2022 Live Well Advance.
- Purchase of intranasal naloxone of which a portion will be allocated to the above-mentioned community-based education and training sessions.

In addition, OD2A-funded efforts under *OD2A Strategy 5: Integration of Local and State Prevention and Response Effort* have included the creation and dissemination of educational materials to increase awareness and education about opioids and fentanyl for youth and parents. Building upon these efforts, ongoing dissemination of resource materials aimed at increasing awareness among parents and youth regarding naloxone and illicit fentanyl will be supported. Lastly, efforts to secure additional funding to further expand and support ongoing education and naloxone training efforts will be explored.

Strategy B: Expand Naloxone Distribution Program

Naloxone Vending Machines

Naloxone, commonly known by the brand name Narcan[®], is a life-saving medication that reverses the effect of an opioid overdose, allowing an individual's normal breathing to be restored. Administration by laypeople began as early as the 1990s and has become increasingly widespread since then.

Research has demonstrated that broad community distribution of naloxone is associated with a reduction in overdose deaths. Coupled with training, naloxone distribution helps ensure those who are using substances and those who are likely to witness an overdose (e.g., family, friends) carry and administer this life-saving medication. To better equip communities to respond to the increasing rise in overdoses, naloxone distribution efforts must aim to saturate the community by establishing mechanisms for easy access to naloxone.

On July 1, 2022, following the Board's approval on December 7, 2021 (22) authorizing the award of a competitive solicitation for naloxone distribution services, a contract establishing the expansion of the County's naloxone distribution program was executed. This newly executed contract sets forth the goal to saturate the community with naloxone through targeted outreach and training efforts, partnerships with community-based programs and the implementation of naloxone vending machines. Currently, the naloxone distribution program contract includes efforts to purchase and place 12 naloxone vending machines throughout San Diego County. Plans for the purchase and placement of vending machines in each of the six HHSA regions are underway, with the first one to be placed at McAllister Institute South Bay Regional Recovery Center in Chula Vista by December 31, 2022. The program will use overdose data and consultation with community organizations that serve those at high risk for overdose, to inform other specific sites for vending machine site placement.

Community interest and support for the placement of naloxone vending machines has been great, prompting recent discussions with providers who serve high-risk populations interested in hosting vending machines. The first Objective within Strategy B recommends increasing the number of

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

naloxone vending machines to be placed throughout San Diego County beyond the initial 12. This proposed expansion of vending machines seeks to encourage more individuals to carry naloxone, including family, friends, community members, and those who are personally at-risk for overdose by increasing points of community access for naloxone. Ensuring easy and widespread access to naloxone will promote and normalize it.

Emergency Medical Services Naloxone Leave Behind Programs

Research shows overdose survivors face a significantly increased risk of fatally overdosing in the future. First responders are uniquely positioned to interrupt the cycle of nonfatal-to-fatal opioid overdose by increasing distribution of overdose prevention resources to patients in real time. Leave behind naloxone is a collaboration between public health and public safety that allows Emergency Medical Service (EMS) personnel to leave naloxone on-scene with patients and their support systems, providing directly to those who need it the most. By distributing these kits, EMS can save lives beyond the patient care given in the moment of an overdose.

On November 10, 2020, the County of San Diego EMS Office developed a partnership with the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) Naloxone Distribution Project (NDP). Through this program, San Diego County paramedic agencies are authorized to implement a local Leave Behind Naloxone Program. The NDP is funded by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and administered by DHCS to address the opioid crisis and reduce overdose deaths through the provision of free naloxone, in its nasal spray formulation. The DHCS program provides naloxone at no cost to EMS agencies for the Leave Behind Naloxone Program. Though the Leave Behind Naloxone Program is an optional initiative, as paramedic agencies are not mandated to participate, efforts to engage paramedic agencies in participating offers increased opportunities to save lives beyond the patient care given in the moment of an overdose. For this reason, this second Objective within Strategy B recommends expanding Naloxone Leave Behind Programs throughout San Diego County through efforts that aim to promote and encourage widespread paramedic agencies' participation.

Strategy C: Intervene Early with Individuals at Highest Risk for Overdose

Most opioid overdoses are accidental and can happen anywhere, anytime, and to anyone. However, certain individuals are at higher risk of experiencing an opioid overdose. These individuals include PWUD who have had a recent non-fatal overdose, have had an extended period of abstinence, use opioids in combination with other substances (e.g., alcohol, other drugs, medicines that suppress respiratory function, such as benzodiazepines, barbiturates, anesthetics, or some pain medications), have comorbidities, such as HIV, liver or lung disease, and mental health conditions. Those at greatest risk often lack access to prevent overdose resources and treatment. For this reason, interventions that focus on engagement and support linkage to services, such as social support networks and culturally-specific recovery supports, are vital in preventing opioid overdoses and maintaining substance use recovery.

Current efforts to ensure individuals who have recently experienced a non-fatal overdose are connected to care are being driven by *OD2A Strategy 6: Establishing Linkages to Care* activities. These activities have focused on identifying processes for integrating care services into emergency rooms for individuals who experience a non-fatal overdose. Building upon this preliminary linkage

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

to care work, the Objective within Strategy C recommends the development of a peer specialist service model that offers outreach and engagement to individuals who recently experienced a non-fatal overdose. Program services will emphasize engagement strategies and focus on developing an individualized overdose response plan, naloxone training, and exploring strategies for reducing the risk of another overdose (for example, by avoiding mixing opioids with other substances and understanding changes in tolerance to opioids). Additionally, program efforts may also include warm handoffs to syringe service programs or other health or social support services. Using this peer model, specialists will facilitate opportunities to foster ongoing relationships that are respectful, collaborative, and cement the connections between people who use drugs and the services that can help them survive and thrive.

Strategy D: Improve Detection of Overdose Outbreaks to Facilitate More Effective Response

Identification of overdose outbreaks and spikes (including those involving fentanyl) can facilitate an effective community response. This is dependent on having a robust surveillance system and data infrastructure to capture a comprehensive and timely picture of drug trends in the community. The first Objective within Strategy D recommends establishing a dedicated resource to facilitate and support countywide integration of an Overdose Mapping and Application Program (ODMAP) – a software that will capture date, time, and location of overdoses through already established first responder data, while maintaining patient confidentiality. Adding this resource would help to advance the existing OD2A surveillance efforts supported by *OD2A Strategy 3: Innovative Surveillance* activities, which aim to develop new and innovative ways to collect and report data on drug use or overdose to better inform community needs and responses. Furthermore, a dedicated resource could allow for real-time analysis and rapid response to potential drug-related outbreaks.

An additional facet of this work is to increase access to drug checking services (also known as pill testing or adulterant screening), particularly through harm reduction organizations, that allows people who use drugs to help identify the substance they intend to take and therefore prevent harms associated with consuming an unknown substance. Drug checking services are often offered alongside other harm reduction services, such as naloxone distribution and Syringe Services Programs (SSPs). There are several technologies that can be employed in the provision of this service, including fentanyl test strips and the use of Fourier-transform Infrared (FTIR) technology that uses light to measure how much of the beam is absorbed by the sample. Using such technology to identify the substance an individual intends to take can encourage safer use, potentially increasing the likelihood of people discarding a substance if hazardous chemicals are present or reduce how much an individual uses if the sample contains substances of increased potency. FTIR technology can also serve as a population health tool to monitor the unregulated drug market, track trends, and allow for early detection and warning systems of harmful substances.

On August 29, 2022, Assembly Bill 1598, was signed by the Governor and Chaptered into law. The new law which takes effect January 1, 2023, amends Sections 11014.5 and 11364.5 of the Health and Safety Code, relating to controlled substances, allowing entities outside of Syringe SSPs to distribute drug checking tools such as fentanyl test strips or any other “testing equipment that is designed, marketed, used, or intended to be used to analyze a substance for the presence of fentanyl, ketamine, gamma hydroxybutyric acid, or any analog of fentanyl.” Currently, *OD2A*

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DECLARING ILLICIT FENTANYL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Strategy 5: Integration of Local and State Prevention and Response Efforts deliverables include the distribution of fentanyl test strips via the naloxone distribution contract.

The passing of this bill presents the opportunity to explore and develop drug checking services which include distribution of fentanyl test strips and the application of FTIR technology in combination with other harm reduction services. SSPs are often a core support system for those at high risk for overdose, and thus well positioned to offer drug checking. Therefore, the second Objective in Strategy D specifically recommends integrating drug checking services into the existing regional SSP planning work, including fentanyl test strip distribution, and potentially FTIR technology. These services would support not only overdose risk mitigation, but also behavior changes among PWUD, and possibly offer information on drug supply trends on the population level.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today’s proposed action supports the County of San Diego’s 2022-2027 Strategic Plan initiatives of Equity (Health) and Community (Quality of Life) as well as the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision, by transforming care to support people who misuse substances through strategic partnerships and implementation of proven harm reduction strategies.

Respectfully submitted,

USE “INSERT PICTURE”
FUNCTION TO INSERT
SIGNATURE

HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A: County of San Diego Recommended Strategies to Address Illicit Fentanyl as a Public Health Crisis