



Closing the Pipeline: America's Opioid Misuse Epidemic

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The inauguration of President Donald Trump marks a new beginning for national security policy in the United States, but a dangerous vulnerability in the global postal system persists threatening the safety of Americans every single day. Nearly one million packages enter into the United States every day without important electronic security data that would allow law enforcement officials to seize dangerous packages shipped from foreign posts. These packages are fueling America's opioid epidemic by allowing deadly materials to reach our shores unchecked through the global postal system.

As surging fatalities linked to the opioid epidemic dominate national headlines, experts are calling for a solution to address the public health crisis. Just last week, Juliette Kayyem, former assistant secretary to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and senior advisor for Americans for Securing All Packages, called on Congress and the Trump Administration to work together to enhance security measures in the global postal system. "On the campaign trail, Donald Trump...picked up on this issue, the vulnerabilities of our mail system, but this...will require a legislative demand by Congress," she said. "**This is doable.**"

Americans for Securing All Packages is hopeful the new administration will act swiftly to close the loophole allowing illegal and potentially hazardous materials, including dangerous drugs, into the United States. Protecting American families and keeping our communities safe is our number one priority. Here are recent snapshots of news, facts, and updates that underscore the immediate need to close this dangerous loophole.

State Action

During a reception in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on January 20, Governor Tom Wolf credited the state for taking the first steps of its kind to confront the opioid epidemic as a disease. Pennsylvania has been disproportionately impacted by the epidemic with approximately 9,500 overdose deaths between 2014 and 2016, but a federal grant totaling nearly \$5.5 million dollars has made it possible to open dozens of treatment centers across the state.

On January 17, Governor Chris Christie signed an executive order declaring the opioid epidemic a public health crisis in New Jersey. The executive order launched the Governor's Task Force on Drug Abuse Control which will spearhead several new initiatives to combat the epidemic in the state.

On January 17, the state of Arizona issued a statewide call to action asking all residents to help in the fight against the prescription drug epidemic. "The state is and will commit to reducing the stigma surrounding opioid abuse and providing community resources," said Debbie Moak, Director of the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith, and Family. She added that this fight would "take a village" and the state needs all hands on deck. According to an alarming report released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention earlier this month, 91 Arizonans die from prescription drug overdoses every day. Arizona saw more than 600 overdose deaths from opioids last year.

On January 9, Senator Chris Murphy traveled to Griswold, Connecticut to discuss the Mental Health Reform Act, a new \$1 billion federal funding bill for mental health and addiction and its impacts for the region. Local officials, law enforcement, community leaders, and medical professionals convened to

discuss the region's response to the opioid epidemic. Despite 730 opioid-related deaths across the state last year – a figure nearly three times higher than the number of deaths from automobile accidents – Senator Murphy warned “we're nowhere near the peak of this epidemic.”

Thoughts on the Epidemic

“In Massachusetts this year, in New Hampshire, three-fourths of the people who died in 2015 of opioid overdose died from fentanyl. If it was occurring at the same rate across the country as it did in Massachusetts. In 2016, that would be 75,000 people a year dying from fentanyl overdoses. Now, the way this is coming into America is pretty much the chemicals come in from China. They go down to Mexico and then they're trafficked into regions of the country,” said Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) during [Rex Tillerson’s nomination hearing](#) for U.S. Secretary of State. “We need to elevate this issue, Mr. Secretary, to a much higher level of importance in our country. The terrorists that's going to kill Americans on the streets of our country are the terrorists who are selling fentanyl. It's the Mexican and Chinese operatives who are funneling this into our country. That is the terrorist fear in the hearts of Americans.”

"The main reason there's a lot of synthetics [in China is] that those [drugs] are controlled in the United States," said Drug Enforcement Administration spokesperson Melvin Patterson in a [recent interview](#) with [ATTN.com](#). "You're going to face some sort of prosecution if you have those illegally [in the U.S.], and they're not all controlled in China. Our appetite for those illegal substances fuels the drive in China to supply that. You get really, really basic into supply and demand. If we didn't have the demand, they wouldn't supply that to us."

“This is another human life lost to opioids brought to Ohio from China,” said U.S. Attorney Carole S. Rendon in response to a recent [overdose death](#) in Akron, Ohio. “We will continue to push for long prison sentences for drug dealers who kill our neighbors and relatives, while also working to reduce the number of opioids on the street, making treatment more readily available and educating our community about the dangers posed by these drugs.”

“Policy-makers need to recognize and understand the gravity of the opioid crisis in our nation and take proactive measures to effectively serve the needs of those addicted to these drugs while also considering the public safety consequences of their decisions,” said Scott Erickson, [President of Americans in Support of Law Enforcement](#), in a recent op-ed published in The Hill.

In the News

Lethal opioids from China are getting to the streets of America courtesy of the US Postal Service (Public Radio International/USA Today 1/19/17)

A drug designed to tranquilize elephants — 100 times more potent than fentanyl — is getting into the United States via an easy route — through the mail. National security analyst Juliette Kayyem says this vulnerability needs to be addressed: "Homeland security has to be about risk reduction and about the vulnerabilities in our system, and while over the past 15 years we've tightened up airline security, cargo security, maritime security, we've done almost nothing with mail," she says.

Recent deaths prompt state warning about Carfentanil (Centre Daily Times 1/24/17)

Overdoses from the synthetic opioid carfentanil recently claimed two lives in Beaver County, which prompted the state to release a warning last week about the risks associated with the deadly drug. Carfentanil is one of the most potent opioids known. The drug, which resembles powdered cocaine or heroin, is about 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times more potent than fentanyl. The

drug is most commonly used as a tranquilizer for large animals, such as elephants, and is not intended or approved for human use. Last year, toxicology reports from overdose victims nationwide began to reveal the presence of carfentanil. After the findings, the Drug Enforcement Administration released a warning to police and the public about the dangers of the drug.

Akron man admits to selling fentanyl from China that resulted in fatal OD (WOIO 1/18/17)

An Akron man has admitted to selling fentanyl obtained in China that resulted in a fatal overdose, authorities said. Leroy Steele, 36, pleaded guilty Wednesday to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute fentanyl, as well as the distribution of fentanyl. The fentanyl Steele distributed resulted in a fatal overdose in Akron in March 2015, according to court documents. Authorities said Steele, Sabrina Robinson, and Ryan Sumlin obtained the fentanyl from suppliers in China and, according to court documents, distributed the drug to people in Akron, Fairlawn, and elsewhere.

Overdose Fatalities From Opioids Hit New Peaks (Wall Street Journal 1/6/2017)

The U.S. opioid crisis shows no sign of receding as a new year begins, with the latest data from several hard-hit cities and states showing overdose fatalities reaching new peaks as authorities scramble to stem the tide. The synthetic opioid fentanyl, which has up to 50 times the potency of heroin, remains the chief culprit driving the increase in fatalities, according to medical examiners and health and law-enforcement authorities in abuse hot spots, such as Ohio, Maryland and New England. Federal data for 2015 deaths came out only last month, showing a nearly 16% climb to 33,091 opioid deaths in the year. Many jurisdictions are still compiling the grim tallies for 2016.

CDC: Connecticut Second In Percent Increase Of Synthetic Opioid Deaths Rate (Hartford Courant 1/6/17)

The rate of deaths from synthetic opioids in Connecticut, including those from fentanyl, more than doubled from 2014 to 2015, the second-highest percentage increase out of 28 states included in a recent federal analysis. The federal report further illustrates the depth of the public health crisis in the state. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report shows that the rate of deaths jumped 125 percent during that time – second only to New York. The rate, the CDC said, is number of deaths per 100,000 people. The analysis was limited to states that met a criteria based on the reporting of drug overdoses on death certificates. In 2015, there were 6.1 deaths per 100,000 residents, up from 2.7 in 2014. Fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid, is often mixed with heroin to increase its potency, raising the risk of overdose, experts say.”

Fentanyl, once obscure, is the deadly drug du jour (Sacramento Bee 1/2/17)

It was March when fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 100 times more powerful than morphine, insinuated itself into Sacramento County. In a matter of weeks, dozens of people overdosed. The drug killed 12 people, including Jerome Butler, a 28-year-old father of three young children. [...]The cartels smuggle ingredients from China and concoct synthetic fentanyl in illicit laboratories. Sometimes they mix it with other drugs, such as heroin, before pushing it to American streets. Sometimes it's pressed into counterfeit prescription pills, such as the painkiller Norco that Butler thought he was taking.

Where Synthetic Opioids Really Come From (ATTN 12/30/16)

President-elect Donald Trump's plan to combat the opioid crisis largely focuses on drug trafficking from Mexico. But in terms of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and carfentanil — powerful narcotics that have contributed to mass overdoses across the United States in recent years — the problem appears to originate in China, according to an Associated Press investigation. Last week, Chinese officials dismissed claims by U.S. drug enforcement officials that the country was behind the surge in synthetics. In a letter

to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), China's National Narcotics Control Commission said the claims "lack the support of sufficient numbers of actual, confirmed cases."