

Devastating consequences of the opioid epidemic include increases in opioid misuse and related overdoses, as well as the rising incidence of newborns experiencing withdrawal syndrome due to opioid misuse during pregnancy. Research is a critical part of the solution in resolving this public health crisis.

Opioids are a class of drugs that include **prescription pain relievers, heroin and synthetic opioids**, such as fentanyl.

Opioid misuse and addiction is a serious public health crisis that affects social and economic welfare.



Every day, 224 Americans die after an overdose involving an opioid.

In 2022, **more than 81,000 Americans died** as a result of an opioid overdose.

~1 in 5 U.S. adults suffer from chronic pain. Lack of safe and non-addictive pain treatments contributes to the opioid crisis.

~9 million people misused opioids in 2023, the vast majority misusing prescription pain relievers.

~75% of all drug overdose deaths in 2020 involved an opioid.



NIH scientists & researchers are working to:

- **Develop a safe, effective medication** for chronic pain that has the effects of opioids without the high risk of addiction and misuse
- **Develop a vaccine** to protect against opioid misuse
- **Treat people with specific opioid use disorders** with buprenorphine injections
- **Improve overdose prevention and reversal interventions** to save lives and support recovery

The NIH HEAL Initiative funds research to find scientific solutions to the national opioid public health crisis.

As of January 2024, NIH supports more than 1,800 research projects to help tackle the national opioid overdose crisis through the **Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL) Initiative**. The HEAL initiative supports research aimed at developing prevention strategies and safe, non-addictive, innovative treatments for opioid misuse, addiction, and pain.

Sources: 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/index.html>; 2. National Institutes of Drug Abuse. (2024). Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>; 3. National Institutes of Health, HEAL Initiative. (2022). Retrieved from <https://heal.nih.gov/>; 4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2023-nsduh-annual-national-report>; 5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/statistics/index.html>

Reliable increases in NIH funding can help prevent and treat opioid use disorders, find safer ways to manage chronic pain, and reduce future healthcare spending.