

DataHaven

Classroom Materials

Title of Material: Opioid Crisis Introduction

Topics Discussed: Public health crisis, opioid usage and abuse, opioid epidemic, stigma, Substance Abuse Disorder

Skills Utilized: Reading skills, data analysis, problem solving, reflective questions

Format: Individual or in pairs

In Person or Online: Either

Procedure/Instruction Suggestions:

Also available as a station activity or as a longer reading with data analysis.

Authored By:
Sarah Wiederecht
Chloe Shawah
John Park
DataHaven
2020

The Opioid Crisis Introduction

Directions: Define the four key terms and then read the background information on the ongoing opioid crisis in Connecticut. You will need this background information to understand the crisis and the data. After you have read, annotated, and discussed the background, formulate a way to show the bolded data in a graph in the space given. Then, answer the thought questions.

Define:

1. Opioid:
2. Crisis:
3. Addiction:
4. Epidemic:

Background:

A wave of drug abuse has gripped the nation for decades, and unfortunately, it is getting worse. Opioids, which include addictive substances like heroin, fentanyl, codeine, hydrocodone, and vicodin, are at the center of this crisis that kills on average 130 Americans daily (CDC). Many of the individuals who are addicted to opioids started with a prescription for pain, like after a surgery.

The opioid crisis has made headlines for years across the country as abuse of and addiction to opiates and opioids has increased dramatically, with some of the highest overdose death rates occurring in the northeast U.S. In 2018, Connecticut ranked 10th among all states in the country in rate of overdose deaths.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention characterizes the epidemic as multilayered with three distinct waves. Prescription opioids were the main drivers of the first wave in the 1990s; heroin was largely responsible for the rise in 2010; and synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, have driven the current wave, which began in 2013.

Thousands of Americans die of opioid overdoses each month, including an average of 67 Connecticut residents per month from 2015 to 2018. **Between 2015 and 2018, Greater Hartford averaged 25.9 drug overdose deaths per 100,000 residents per year, higher than the state's average rate of 24.2 per 100,000; filtered for just opiate and opioid-related deaths, these rates become 24.6 and 22.8, respectively. Over just a few years, the number of deaths per year from drug overdoses in Greater Hartford more than doubled, from 116 deaths in 2013 to 247 deaths in 2016; this increase was driven mostly by a steep rise in opiate- and opioid-related deaths.**

The death rate from drug overdoses in Greater Hartford has mirrored the upward trend seen throughout the state and country, generally staying about tied with the statewide rate. **Data have also shown the skyrocketing prominence of fentanyl: the substance was detected in only 6 out of Greater Hartford's 206 overdose deaths (3 percent) in 2012 and 2013, but in 434 of the 567 deaths (77 percent) in 2017 and 2018.**

The reach of the opioid crisis goes beyond just people who have struggled with addiction themselves. In the 2018 DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey, nearly one in every three adults in Greater New Haven reported knowing someone who has struggled with opioid abuse or addiction in the past three years. Out of that one-third of respondents, 6 percent said they themselves were struggling with opioids, 40 percent cited a family member, 38 percent cited a close friend, and 44 percent cited an acquaintance. These numbers include adults who knew multiple people dealing with addiction.

Nationwide efforts have been made to confront this ongoing epidemic. Treatment options can range from facility care, inpatient care, outpatient support, medication, mentor programs, 12-step programs, counseling and more. An individual's treatment options are dependent on their ability to afford treatment, ability to get to the treatment (like transportation to a clinic or group), the support they receive from others, and the work they put in to recover. Other supports are becoming widely available, like Narcan. Narcan is an emergency-use drug that can be injected to reverse the effects of a fatal opioid overdose. In recent years, Narcan has become more widely available and saved many lives. Methadone clinics, which can help individuals who are addicted to opioids detox and wean themselves off of opioids, also play a pivotal role in safe treatment for opioid abuse. Methadone is also an opioid, but has weaker addictive effects, and so it allows people to transition away from opioid abuse. However, these are only the first steps towards recovery.

Ongoing conversation about the prescribing of opioids and how we can reform healthcare in a way to help this crisis are more commonplace. However, stigma about drug use and addiction stand in the way of healing. Until addiction is understood as a social and health-related issue rather than a personal choice, the fight to end the opioid crisis will struggle.

Graph:

Thought Questions:

1. In your own words, describe the opioid crisis.
2. What can we do as a society to help confront this crisis? Give at least three ideas and why they would be important steps.
3. What can you do to help confront this crisis? Think about what power you have, as a young student, to create positive change and confront this crisis.