



Commonwealth of Kentucky Justice & Public Safety Cabinet

Andy Beshear, Governor

Kerry Harvey, Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2021 Kentucky Drug Overdose Report Now Available

Increased use of fentanyl largest contributor to rise in death toll

FRANKFORT, Ky. (June 13, 2022) – Today, the Commonwealth of Kentucky released the 2021 Drug Overdose Report which indicates that 2,250 Kentuckians died from drug overdoses in 2021, a 14.5% increase compared with the year prior. More than 107,000 overdose deaths were [reported](#) in the United States between December 2020 to December 2021.

According to cases autopsied by Kentucky's Office of the State Medical Examiner and toxicology reports submitted by Kentucky coroners, the rise in the death toll was driven largely by an increased use in fentanyl which accounts for approximately 70% of all overdose deaths for the year. Additionally, the increase in overdose deaths was worsened by the widespread availability of potent inexpensive methamphetamine.

"Here in the commonwealth, we have been fighting a long battle against the opioid epidemic. This public health crisis has torn families apart and taken the lives of far too many Kentuckians, far too soon," **Gov. Andy Beshear** said. "Every day we

must work together to fund recovery programs and treatment options so that we can continue to address this scourge and get our people the help they need.”

[The 2021 Overdose Fatality Report](#), released by the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet and the Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP), compiled data from the Office of the State Medical Examiner, the Kentucky Injury Prevention & Research Center and the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics.

“The drug epidemic is not a Kentucky issue or political issue, but a nationwide issue that is affecting everyone and every state,” said **ODCP Executive Director Van Ingram**. “Our focus over this next year will be on increasing access to clinical care for those suffering from an addiction and offering more harm reduction measures.”

Since his appointment as Secretary of the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, Kerry Harvey has made it clear that fighting the drug epidemic while reducing the stigma around it is a top priority.

“The Justice and Public Safety Cabinet has been and remains committed to those struggling with addiction and their families,” said **Secretary Harvey**. “The safety of all Kentuckians is one of the issues at the heart of this problem. We are working to provide help to all those affected by drug addiction, especially those who are seeking to go into recovery.”

Fighting the Epidemic

Through partnerships across state government, including the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, the Beshear-Coleman administration is diligently working to provide wider and easier access to recovery, reduce addiction and prevent reincarceration of offenders. These programs will help continue the fight against the drug epidemic in Kentucky while providing help for those who need it.

[Earlier today](#), the Governor announced that Kentucky is working to establish counties as "Recovery Ready Communities" in an effort to help individuals fighting an addiction receive critical resources at no cost, and work to reduce the ongoing public health crisis that is sweeping across the nation. This is in response to [Gov. Beshear signing House Bill 7](#) last year, which ensures communities are recovery-ready through the availability of high quality recovery programs offered within their area.

HB 7 created the [Advisory Council for Recovery Ready Communities](#) within ODCP, who is partnering with Volunteers of America to launch a Recovery Ready Community Certification Program for cities and counties to apply for upon offering transportation, support groups, recovering meetings and employment services at no cost to residents currently seeking treatment for a drug or alcohol addiction.

During the 2022 legislative session, Gov. Beshear continued his work to champion legislation to fight the epidemic and ensure necessary support is available to those who are struggling with addiction. The Governor worked with a bipartisan group of state leaders to act on [recommendations](#) made by The Pew Charitable Trusts on how to best address the opioid crisis. This includes signing [Senate Bill 90](#) into law to provide eligible individuals an alternative to receive treatment for a behavioral health disorder instead of incarceration, expand recovery-ready housing as well as access to treatment for pregnant and parenting people in rural areas.

Additionally, the Governor took legislative action to help those suffering from an addiction who are not in a position to seek help for themselves. [Casey's Law](#), signed in 2004, has helped more than 6,000 Kentuckians battling addiction by allowing families and loved ones to seek a court order for involuntary treatment for anyone who is fighting addiction and refuses treatment on their own. Gov. Beshear signed [House Bill 362](#) in April to expand on the benefit of Casey's Law by permitting the court to determine, beyond a reasonable doubt, if an individual should be ordered to undergo treatment for a substance use disorder. At this time, the court shall order treatment for a specific amount of time. If the individual fails to undergo treatment, they will be held in contempt of court.

[In April](#), Gov. Beshear and ODCP announced \$4.9 million in grants to offer comprehensive treatment and recovery services to pregnant and parenting people. This funding will not only help parents recover from opioid addiction, but will also address Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, a condition caused by an infant going through drug withdrawal.

“The new funding and bipartisan actions will not only allow the Commonwealth of Kentucky to continue the fight against the opioid epidemic, but will also increase the chances of us winning,” **Gov. Beshear** said. “We are not only committed to helping those struggling with addiction and recovery; we are committed to helping their families as well.”

By the end of this year, ODCP estimates it will have awarded more than \$69 million in grant funding to programs across the state that provide treatment services and recovery programs, as well as employment and job training in the past three years alone. This grant funding will allow Kentuckians the opportunity to get safe and effective treatment easier than ever before.

“This new funding has expanded the ability of ODCP to address the heart of the issue,” **Executive Director Ingram** said. “This is not just a matter of getting drugs off the street. Addiction is a mental health issue as well, and we are working to make sure that it is treated as such.”

[In February](#), Gov. Beshear announced that, through a federal grant, the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the University of Kentucky are administering Narcan, a brand name for the medicine naloxone, in eight counties at no cost to help reduce overdose deaths. As of today, more than 500 units have been distributed. Eight more counties will be added to the program this summer.

This new funding is in addition to millions of dollars of grant funding announced by the Beshear-Coleman administration in 2021. This includes more than [\\$570,000](#) to the Jeffersontown Police Department and Access to Justice Commission to develop a variety of treatment options; [almost \\$1.2 million](#) to implement a project creating pathways to recovery and healing for individuals suffering from addiction;

[\\$1,698,441](#) in federal grant funding to assist the fight against the opioid epidemic through targeted drug trafficking enforcement; and [\\$188,784](#) to ensure that children negatively impacted by parental addiction have access to legal services, community resources and therapeutic services.

By the end of this year, the “HEALing Communities Study,” conducted by the National Institutes of Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, should be completed. This study hopes to identify the most effective means of intervention to assist in reducing overdose deaths in the commonwealth and around the nation. Kentucky was one of four states chosen to participate in the study. For more information on the study’s research on the impact community intervention has on reducing overdose deaths in Kentucky, [click here](#).

Treatment Resources

Call the KY Help Call Center at 833-8KY-HELP (833-859-4357) to speak one-on-one with a specialist who can connect Kentuckians to treatment.

Visit findhelpnowky.org to find information about available space in treatment programs and providers based on location, facility type and category of treatment needed.

Visit the [KSP website](#) to find one of KSP’s 16 posts where those suffering from addiction can be paired with a local officer who will assist with locating an appropriate treatment program. The Angel Initiative is completely voluntary, and individuals will not be arrested or charged with any new drug violations if they agree to participate in treatment.

For a video from Gov. Beshear on available treatment and resources, and the importance of knowing how to respond to an overdose, [click here](#).

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