

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. NIH-funded research plays a critical role in addressing 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, 128 Americans die after overdosing on opioids.

In 2018, **nearly 47,000 Americans died** as a result of an opioid overdose.

~ 21 to 29 percent of patients who are prescribed pain relievers for chronic pain misuse them.

~ 8 to 12% of patients who misuse pain relievers develop an opioid use disorder.

~\$78.5 billion per year is spent addressing U.S. prescription opioid misuse, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and the criminal justice response.

National Institute of Drug Abuse. Opioid Overdose Crisis. (2019)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Drug Overdose Deaths. (2019)



NIH scientists & researchers are working to:

- **Develop a safe, effective medication** for chronic pain that has the effects of opioids without the risk of addiction and misuse
- **Develop a vaccine** to protect against opioid misuse
- **Support development of the drug buprenorphine** used to relieve opioid withdrawal symptoms and decrease cravings
- **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.

In fiscal year 2019, the NIH funded **\$945 million** in research to tackle the national opioid overdose crisis through the **Helping to End Addiction Long-term Initiative (HEAL) Initiative**. (HEAL Initiative, NIH, 2019)

The HEAL initiative supports research aimed at improving treatments for chronic pain, opioid use prevention and overdose, and sustainable recovery.

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.