

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you on this incredibly important topic.

First off, I would like to note that I, like many people in this country, have known people that have been burdened with an opioid addiction. Some of them made it to the other side of recovery, and others didn't. I fully acknowledge that there is a problem in this country that is running out of control like wildfire, and I am very much on the side that would like to see it extinguished.

Having made it clear that I support any effort that somehow manages to get this problem under control, I would ask the readers of this comment to re-envision this effort, into something that does more than simply tracks the problem. Again, I would like to state that I do fully understand the importance of gathering data that allows people to track problems and attempt to stop them – and I do agree that this is vital to fixing any issue; however, as this country has watched drug overdose deaths more than triple since 1990¹, I think that we need to do more than simply extinguish small fires as they continue to pop up. We need to take a deep look at this issue and *address* it, rather than simply track it.

The issue of drug abuse has been around for a long time and it is no secret that there is an element of escapism that can be associated with people's drug use. People may not initially turn to drugs because they are looking to escape, but the truth is that many stay there because of it.

The NIH tells us that most drugs cause people to feel good, as the "reward circuit" in the brain is activated with each use.² With the issues that people face in our world today, it seems somewhat obvious to me why people would want to escape. Between the stress of social media, pollution that threatens the planet, gun violence, economic difficulties, low minimum wage, outrageous costs of healthcare, systemic racism, political violence, access to quality education - the list could go on and on – it's no wonder that people need ways to mentally cope with the world around them. The America that we know today is not the America that we knew in 1990. With each passing year, our world seems to become more volatile and more fragile, and that does have an impact people's mental health – which can lead to drug use.

When looking at the CDC Drug Overdose Death Rates by year, in the view of a map of the United States, we can quickly see that for the most part, the location of drug overdoses has remained fairly stable³. If

¹ Understanding the epidemic. (2021, March 17). Retrieved June 03, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>

² National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2021, May 29). Understanding drug use and addiction drug facts. Retrieved June 03, 2021, from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction>

³ 2019 drug overdose death rates. (2021, March 22). Retrieved June 03, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths/drug-overdose-death-2019.html>

you were to imagine a line that goes from the state of Missouri, East to Maine, we see the traditional states that struggle with things like low education, poor healthcare, low wages, and perhaps most importantly a lack of mental health care. Dealing with the unexpected events of day-to-day life is hard enough, add all of the other mental stress that the world has going on and it can be overwhelming.

This document had the following statement within its contents: “This data collection effort, an essential component toward reducing the opioid crisis, is one of the top priorities for HHS.” Data collection is great and incredibly important, but we know there are issues and for the most part we know where they are at – I ask that policy makers put more effort in to *solving* the problem through things like mental health access and addiction help, instead of simply *tracking* it.

I do thank you for reading my concerns regarding this issue, and please know that I do applaud your efforts to help this situation in any way possible.

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