



The Opioid Crisis in the US

If nothing is done, the opioid epidemic could kill as many as 650,000 people over the next 10 years - more than the entire city of Baltimore*

Source: STAT forecast

1. How bad is this crisis?



It simply is the deadliest in American history. In 2016, overdoses **killed roughly 64,000 people**, becoming the leading cause of death among Americans under 50

Overdoses are only the tip of the iceberg: about **97.5 million people used prescription opioids** in 2015 and it is estimated that over 2 million Americans have an opioid use disorder

Source: First governmental account of nationwide drug deaths

2. What's an opioid anyway?



Opioids are substances obtained from the opium poppy. These powerful drugs are used to **treat severe pain**, but they also produce a sense of well-being to the point of euphoria that may **trigger abuse and addiction**

Opioids include **illicit drugs** like morphine and heroin, and **prescription painkillers** such as Percocet and OxyContin - in addition, some drugs are not plant-derived but made in a laboratory: **fentanyl and fentanyl analogs** are synthetic compounds up to 40 times more powerful than heroin

3. Is the crisis about painkillers or heroin?



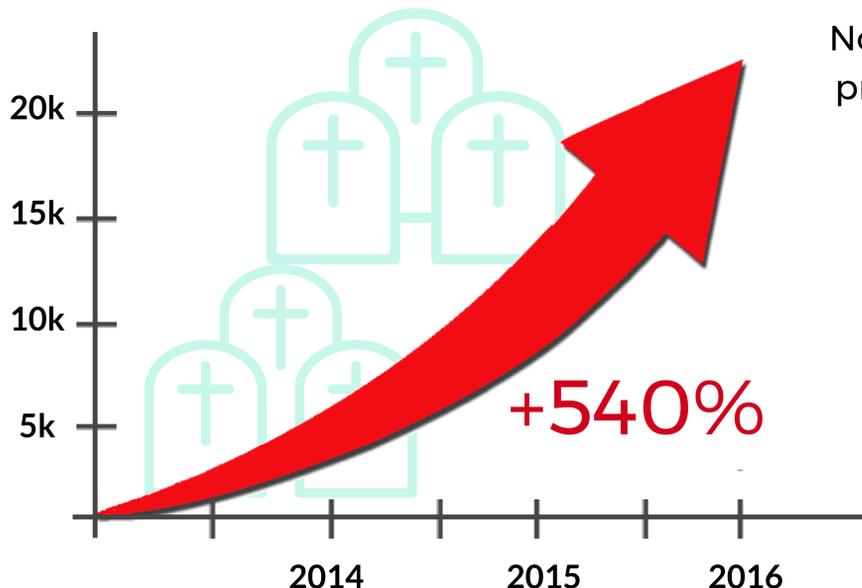
Both. The crisis began with **overprescription of opioid pain relievers** in the 90s which led to them becoming the most prescribed class of medications in the US

As of 2016, more than **289 million prescriptions** of opioid analgesic pain relievers were written each year

This led to a rapid escalation of prescription drug misuse and then to **a resurgence of heroin use**, as users transitioned to this cheaper street cousin of expensive prescription opioids

Source: The Surgeon General's Report on alcohol, Drugs and Health, 2016

4. Has the situation improved?

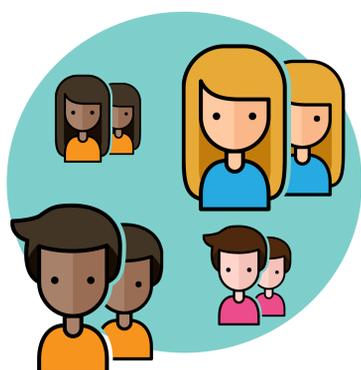


Not really. While deaths involving prescription opioids have leveled off, **deaths from heroin and fentanyl** are rising fast

Drug deaths involving fentanyl and other analogues are up 540% in three years, **reaching 20,000 deaths**

Source: First governmental account of nationwide drug deaths

5. What can be done about it?



We need to expand treatment. Of the 2 million Americans with an opioid use disorder, **only a million** can get the treatment they need

We also need to get **naloxone** (a lifesaving overdose reversal drug) in the hands of more first responders and family members

We need to **reform pain management techniques** without swinging the pendulum too far in the opposite direction: opioids are a vital component of modern medicine and **we should continue to use them** for legitimate pain.

Lastly, we should **stop judging people** and **start helping them**