

TO: Regina LaBelle: Acting Director of Office of National Drug Control Policy

FROM: Andres Alvarez

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SUBJECT: Cartels Use Social Media for Fentanyl Distribution

SOCIAL MEDIA LEVERAGED ILLICIT FENTANYL SALES COULD WORSEN OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mexican drug cartels selling fentanyl via social media may increase U.S. fentanyl consumer fatality rates. On 22 July, the D.E.A warned that fentanyl propagation in the U.S. by transnational cartels has risen due to social media¹. The D.E.A recognizes fentanyl as a critical concern, with cartels utilizing the opioid epidemic and opioid misuse to create a burgeoning trade, with an 89% increase in fentanyl seizures along the U.S.-Mexico border between January 2019 and December 2020². Additionally, the use of social media for domestic U.S. sales follows a trend of more significant media employment by cartels to recruit, threat messaging, and propaganda purposes³.

The D.E.A. reported that Mexican cartels are producing counterfeit fentanyl pills made to look like pharmaceutically produced medications and are marketing the pills to people of all ages in the U.S. via social media⁴. The use of social media by cartels puts

¹ Resendiz, Julian. "Cartels Take to Social Media to Peddle Deadly Fentanyl Pills, DEA Says." BorderReport. BorderReport, July 22, 2021. <https://www.borderreport.com/hot-topics/border-crime/cartels-take-to-social-media-to-peddle-deadly-fentanyl-pills-dea-says>.

*Border report is a moderate publication that focuses on news and events surrounding the U.S. Mexico Border

² "DEA Launches Project Wave Breaker to Stop Flood of Deadly Fentanyl." DEA. National Media Affairs , 2021. <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2021/04/27/dea-launches-project-wave-breaker-stop-flood-deadly-fentanyl-1>.

*The DEA is the Drug Enforcement Administration of the U.S. and conducts research on the trade of illicit substances.

³ Bunker, Dr. Robert. "Mexican Cartel Use of Social Media." GNET, March 23, 2021. <https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/23/mexican-cartel-use-of-social-media/>.

*The Global Network on Extremism and Technology conducts academic research on the ways terrorists use technology

⁴ Resendiz, Julian. "Cartels Take to Social Media to Peddle Deadly Fentanyl Pills, DEA Says." Fox 8 Cleveland WJW. Fox 8 Cleveland WJW, July 22, 2021. <https://fox8.com/news/cartels-take-to-social-media-to-peddle-deadly-fentanyl-pills-dea-says/>. *Fox 8 Cleveland is a Fox affiliated tv station out of Cleveland, OH.

vulnerable populations who commonly use social media, such as adolescents⁵, at greater risk of obtaining and using fentanyl. According to the C.D.C., 2020 had the highest rate of drug overdose deaths ever recorded in 12 months, with synthetic opioids such as fentanyl responsible for the increase in fatalities⁶. Social media marketing by Mexican drug cartels creates easy access for U.S. drug consumers to obtain highly lethal drugs such as fentanyl and increases the possibility of an upsurge of U.S. fentanyl-related deaths.

⁵ AACAP. Social Media and Teens. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2018. https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Social-Media-and-Teens-100.aspx. *AACAP is a non-profit professional association dedicated to psychiatric care for children and adolescents.

⁶ “Overdose Deaths Accelerating During COVID-19.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 18, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html>. *CDC is a U.S. public health agency.