



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FENTANYL CRISIS

PREPARED BY

Ximan XU

Public Affairs

Prof. Metcalfe

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Background information:

The fentanyl crisis is the worst drug-related public health emergency in the history of the United States, driven by a surge in overdose deaths and significant social costs. At the center of this crisis is the synthetic opioid fentanyl, which is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine (Klobucista, 2023). Most of the illicit fentanyl consumed in the United States is manufactured from precursor chemicals supplied by China. These chemicals are processed in Mexico by drug cartels and smuggled across the southern border. Because of the properties of fentanyl, drug smugglers can meet large-scale demand in smaller quantities, which makes law enforcement detection significantly more difficult. Fentanyl is often laced with other drugs (e.g., cocaine) or pressed into counterfeit prescription drugs, making it difficult for consumers to detect. Fentanyl's high potency, ease of production, and adulteration into counterfeit drugs make fentanyl a unique and deadly threat.

The New Crown outbreak further exacerbated the fentanyl crisis. Supply chain disruptions during the outbreak forced many to turn to unfamiliar drugs such as fentanyl. In turn, socially isolated social environments led more people to use drugs alone. Lack of control over dosage then significantly increased the risk of overdose deaths. The drug characteristics of fentanyl and the impact of the new crown epidemic are mainly driving the current opioid epidemic. The increasing proportion of fentanyl in the illicit drug supply has had a devastating impact on American society.

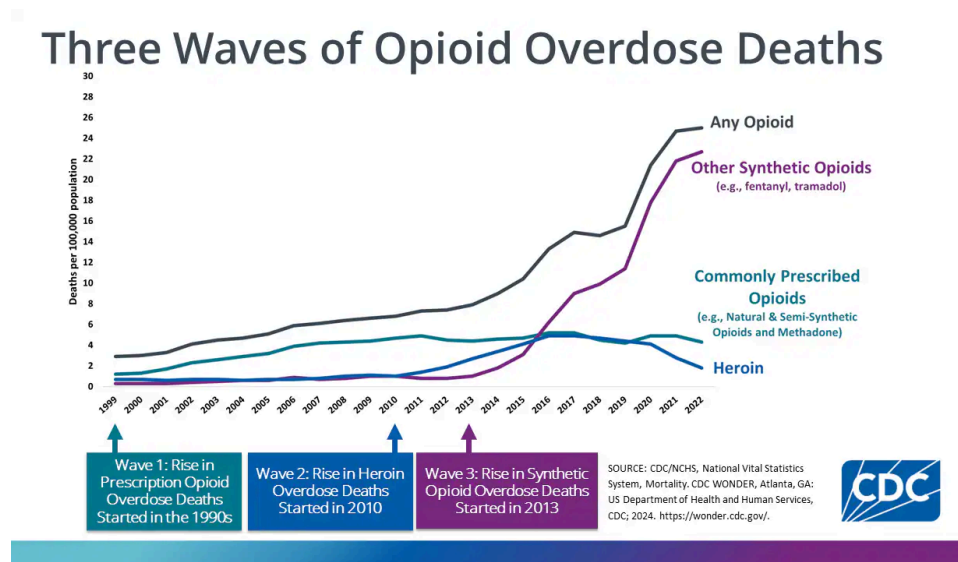
Why this is an important issue:

The fentanyl crisis in the United States has become a severe public health problem. It is a public health issue and has far-reaching implications for national security, the economy, and the social fabric. First and foremost is the threat to public health in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2022, there will be a total of more than 82,000 deaths in the United States from opioid overdoses, with fentanyl being the leading cause of death, accounting for nearly 76% of all drug overdose deaths (CDC, 2024). On average, 224 people die from opioid overdose every day (Products - Vital Statistics Rapid Release). This number is up dramatically from previous years, showing the considerable impact fentanyl has on overdose mortality. It only takes 2 milligrams (the size of 10-15 grains of salt) of fentanyl to be fatal, which puts drug users at a significantly higher risk of unknowingly overdosing (Ferragamo, 2023). This also makes fentanyl-related overdoses the leading cause of death

among Americans aged 18 to 45, surpassing other causes of death such as traffic accidents, suicide, and heart disease (Klobucista, 2023).

Secondly, the fentanyl crisis has also had a significant socio-economic impact on the U.S. In 2020, the U.S. economy lost \$1.5 trillion as a result of the opioid crisis, which is equivalent to 7% of that year's GDP (Ferragamo, 2023). The fentanyl crisis has led to the destruction of many communities by addiction problems and drug dealing, further exacerbating poverty and inequality.

Research through the CDC has shown that the opioid crisis has gone through three distinct phases over the past three decades. From 2013 to the present, synthetic opioids (especially illegally manufactured fentanyl) have caused overdose deaths to reach unprecedented levels and continue to rise (CDC, 2024).



These data indicate that the fentanyl crisis has had a profound impact on life, health, and social stability in the United States and requires urgent public health interventions and policy measures to respond.

Target audience

In the case of the fentanyl crisis, I hope to ameliorate the crisis through a crisis response program for teens ages 10-18. The reason why teenagers were chosen as the target audience for this crisis is because teenagers are the key group in responding to the fentanyl crisis. Although many people believe that young adults ages 18-45 are the leading group of fentanyl-related overdose deaths. However, I believe that adolescents are a high-risk group for

risky behaviors and that disseminating correct information about drug risks and choices to adolescents can have a profound impact on the public health of future generations.

First, the trend of fentanyl use and overdose deaths among adolescents is serious. The number of fentanyl-related deaths among adolescents aged 10 to 19 years nearly doubled from 2019 to 2021 (Klobucista, 2023). Many adolescents mistakenly take counterfeit drugs containing fentanyl, leading to fatal consequences. Of all the data on deaths involving drug overdoses, the proportion of overdose deaths in adolescents from fentanyl counterfeit prescription drugs is increasing dramatically. Second, adolescents are in a stage of behavioral formation and exploration and have limited knowledge of drugs and associated risks. School, family, and social pressures often serve as triggers for adolescents to experiment with drugs.

Moreover, social media provides a convenient way for teens to obtain counterfeit drugs. This makes adolescents a high-risk group for fentanyl risk behaviors. Finally, adolescents are in the stage of behavior formation and exploration, making them known as the best stage for preventive interventions. Early education for adolescents can minimize the chances of them experimenting with fentanyl or other drugs.

Overall, adolescents are a key target group for ameliorating the fentanyl crisis because they are at high risk for risky behaviors and are heavily influenced by counterfeit drugs and social media. Moreover, compared to other audience groups, adolescents can make significant progress in mitigating the fentanyl crisis through community education, policy support, and early intervention while protecting the next generation from the threat of drug abuse. Early intervention not only protects this generation of adolescents but also establishes healthier patterns of drug use for future societies.

Goal :

Given the severity of the fentanyl crisis, we have developed the following three clear strategic goals to reduce fentanyl-related overdose deaths and promote safe behaviors among high-risk youth populations:

1. Over 12 months, work with local schools, healthcare providers, legislatures, and community organizations to conduct educational discussions, legislative advocacy, and specific activities. Distribute 5,000 fentanyl test strips and 1,000 naloxone kits in at-risk neighborhoods to raise public awareness of the dangers of fentanyl while providing youth with practical risk prevention tools and support networks.

2. The project will launch in January 2025 and be completed in December 2025, with an education program covering 50 target schools. A combination of classroom curricula, digital outreach, and community activities ensures that at least 75% of participating students demonstrate significant cognitive gains in pre- and post-project tests, acquire basic skills in recognizing counterfeit drugs, and learn to cope with associated risks.

3. Promote three relevant pieces of legislation, including standardized risk awareness education by incorporating fentanyl risk education into K-12 school curricula nationwide. It also strengthens the regulation of illegal drug transactions on social media platforms by requiring platforms to provide relevant risk education resources to protect youth from the dangers of drug abuse.

With these clear goals and strategies, we aim to form a comprehensive and collaborative solution to effectively curb the impact of the fentanyl crisis on youth from three perspectives: education, community support, and policy and legislation.

Information Dissemination Strategies:

Consistency of the message needs to be maintained in the information dissemination strategy for adolescents. Our messaging strategy aims to sensitize teens and their families to the seriousness of the fentanyl crisis through a precise, empathetic, and multi-channel communication approach. Core messages will focus on reminding teens of the dangers of the drug and building vigilance to prevent addiction. For example, slogans such as "Not all pills are safe - even one fake pill can kill, let us prevent the fentanyl tragedy" were used to quickly and effectively communicate the core message of the campaign.

Among the communication channels, the average 13-18-year-old spends more than 3 hours a day on social media, as 95% of teens use social media (Klobucista, 2023). The majority of fentanyl-related counterfeit drug transactions also take place through social media platforms, making the dissemination of educational content for adolescents through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat crucial.

Secondly, more than 90% of adolescents are educated in middle or high school, making educational institutions such as schools one of the most important channels for disseminating information targeting adolescents (Klobucista, 2023). This is because schools are the central

place to reach adolescents. Educational information can be disseminated more directly to large groups of adolescents through classes, activities, and extracurricular programs. Teachers, counselors, and peers in the school setting can provide a supportive network for adolescent messaging and behavior change. In past data, it has also been shown that programs that implement health education through schools have been shown to have a 70-80% uptake of relevant information and can significantly increase students' perceptions of drug risks (Public Health, 2024).

Many would ignore and question the role of local media in disseminating information that affects teenagers, arguing that today's teenagers no longer watch local media and spend more time on social media. However, I argue that local media, such as television, radio, and community newspapers, are effective in reaching adolescents' parents and families, thus indirectly influencing adolescent behavior. 68% of Americans rely on local news sources for information directly related to their community, so local radio and television are still the preferred sources of information for many families, especially in low-income neighborhoods, which often are at high risk for the fentanyl crisis (CDC, 2024; Ferragamo, 2023). We can use people's high credibility with local media to provide additional credible endorsements for educational campaigns and increase the success of publicizing fentanyl education campaigns. High

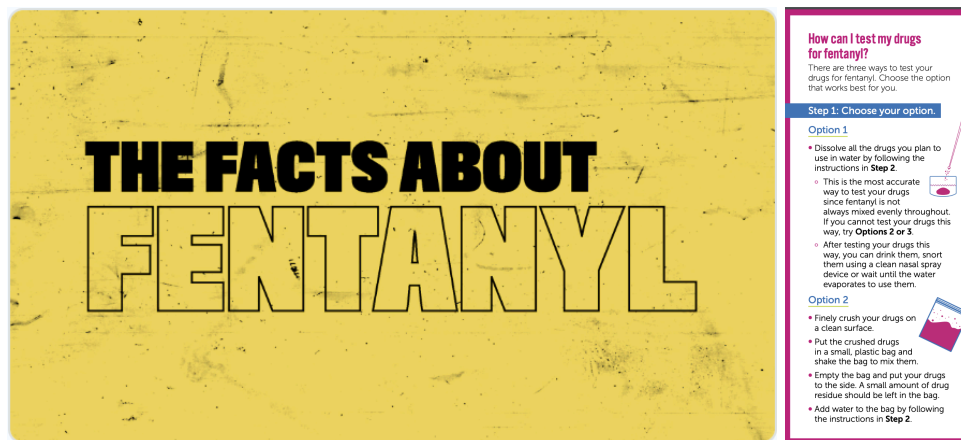
Social media, local media, and educational organizations were chosen as communication channels because they can effectively reach groups of youth and their families and provide high credibility and impact. Social media can quickly reach target groups and stimulate interactive engagement. Local media can generate attention at the family level. Educational institutions provide the best platform for systematic and long-term interventions. By integrating these communication channels, education and prevention campaigns for the fentanyl crisis can achieve their goals more broadly and deeply.

Tactics:

Education Programs

We have designed a series of school-focused education strategies to raise young people's awareness of the risks of fentanyl, promote a change in public attitudes, and guide them to develop a healthy lifestyle.

First, through school curricula, interactive workshops, and digital outreach, we help youth understand the dangers of fentanyl and the proper use of opioids in order to improve their risk perception across the board. For example, educational content like the CDC's "The Facts about Fentanyl" can be incorporated into the classroom to educate students about fentanyl, counterfeit drugs, and the resulting overdose problem through videos and fact sheets (Fentanyl Facts, 2024). However, traditional education on school topics often needs help to achieve the desired results due to boredom and low student engagement. Hornik et al. (2016) suggested that humor is the second most persuasive factor after rational content and above fear appeal. Therefore, we suggest using interactive and visual communication methods, such as interactive games and simulated lecturer activities, to stimulate student interest and enhance communication effectiveness.



For example, introducing the Risky Pathways action game is a practice-oriented interactive design. The classroom is set up with several simulated scenarios, such as pills handed by a friend, drug advertisements on social media, and a drug overdose first aid situation. In small groups, students first determine the authenticity of the medication (by color, shape, packaging, and other characteristics) and then choose how to respond to each scenario (e.g., "refuse and report" or "accept the pill"). Each choice leads the group to the next stage of the scenario and ultimately reveals these choices' potential safety and health implications. By explaining the typical characteristics of counterfeit drugs and how to test the safety of drugs with fentanyl test strips, students will learn to recognize drug risks and the proper way to respond.

Building on the youth's knowledge of the basics of fentanyl, we will further promote dialogue between students and parents by organizing a parent-child workshop. The workshops not only encourage students to initiate discussions about the dangers of fentanyl and their concerns but

also provide parents with tools to help them recognize the early signs of substance abuse and communicate more effectively with their teens. Through interactive activities such as these, as well as peer mentoring programs and the sharing of real-life examples, a supportive community and family environment is created to help prevent substance abuse from the ground up.

Along with classroom education, the scope and effectiveness of awareness education were further enhanced by launching a reciprocal campaign on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. Use a hashtag like #FakePillsRealDanger to create youth-friendly content, including short videos, infographics, and interactive quizzes, to increase engagement in knowledge education. As stated in previous studies, a significant cause of fentanyl overdose is private individuals' lack of knowledge about the serving size. To prevent this, social media content also provides contact information for the school's medical department.

Finally, to assess the actual effectiveness of the education strategy, pre-and post-tests will be conducted in schools to ensure that at least 75% of students show significant cognitive enhancement after participating in the program. This education-centered strategy not only helps to improve the cognitive level of young people but also lays a solid foundation for promoting a comprehensive solution to the fentanyl crisis.

Community involvement

1. Strengthening community resources

By partnering with community centers and healthcare providers, we will create a one-stop support platform at community resource centers focused on distributing educational materials, fentanyl test strips, and naloxone toolkits to directly raise awareness of the dangers of fentanyl among young people and families, and to provide practical crisis response tools. To begin, the educational materials will be designed as informational brochures and posters with visual, easy-to-understand content covering the dangers of fentanyl, how to recognize counterfeit drugs, and critical steps to avoid overdose. These materials will be distributed through community events, health centers, and school parent-teacher conferences to ensure that more at-risk populations are reached. The availability of fentanyl test strips will be one of the core interventions, and these test strips will help youth and families quickly detect if a suspected drug is contaminated with fentanyl to reduce the risk of unintentional overdose. The test strips with simple instructions will be available for free or at a low cost. Participants will be taught how to recognize overdose symptoms, how to administer first aid, and provided with post-emergency

resources. Through these comprehensive initiatives, we not only help community members raise awareness of the risks but also provide them with practical means of protection and response, especially in high-risk communities with limited resources, which will significantly reduce fentanyl-related harms.

2. Organize thematic activities and advocacy projects in collaboration with grassroots organizations

To profoundly influence public attitudes and promote more positive preventive behaviors among young people, we will collaborate with community leaders, religious institutions, and youth groups to organize long-term thematic activities and advocacy programs that provide a safe and supportive environment for young people to proactively avoid the risk of drugs. Monthly thematic events will feature community leaders and youth ambassadors and will include fentanyl risk education, honest story sharing, and scenario simulations (e.g., drills on coping with drug overdose). These activities engage young people through interactive formats, such as creating slogans and recording short anti-drug videos, to enhance their understanding of the fentanyl crisis and help spread the prevention message. To further extend our impact, we will also collaborate with religious organizations to launch a support group program, which will provide a platform for youth and their families to have regular discussions on issues related to the fentanyl crisis and share coping strategies. The support group will also conduct psychosocial support activities, especially targeting youths who have been exposed to drugs or are at risk of addiction, to help them build more robust defenses. In addition, the 'Fentanyl Education Ambassadors' program will select actively participating youths to serve as peer mentors so they can use their influence to bring their peers together and expose more youths to prevention messages through a peer-led model. Through these activities and advocacy programs, we reach out to at-risk youth and help them find a support network in a crisis. We also further promote long-term engagement and behavioral change within the community to radically reduce the risk of a fentanyl crisis.

Legislative Support

Based on knowledge dissemination and intervention at the school and community levels, we will help young people cope with the fentanyl crisis more comprehensively by promoting legislative support to provide them with legal protection and institutional safeguards.

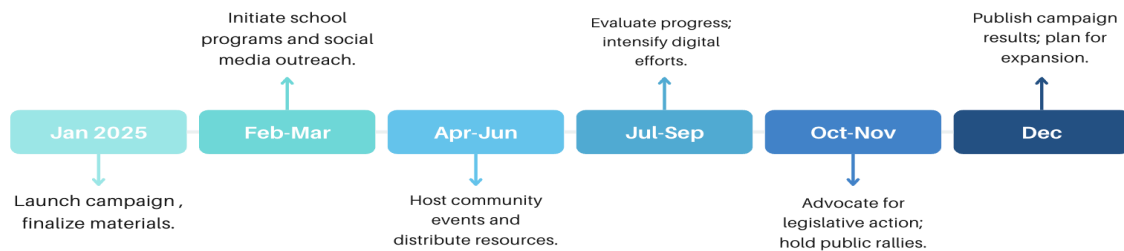
First, advocate for including fentanyl risk education in K-12 school curricula to promote the standardization of risk awareness education nationwide. This legislation would ensure that every student can systematically learn the basics about fentanyl, including how to recognize counterfeit drugs, understand the potential harms of the drug, and strategies to prevent drug abuse. Second, because counterfeit prescription drugs are often distributed and attracted to teens through social media, with **60% of counterfeit drugs containing lethal doses of fentanyl** (Klobucista, 2023), we will push for increased regulation of social media and online platforms. Specific measures include requiring technology companies to block illegal drug transactions and providing risk education resources on relevant pages to ensure that youth are exposed to reliable information. Additionally, in order to reduce overdose deaths, we will push to expand the scope of the Good Samaritan Law so that young people can seek help for overdoses without fear of legal repercussions, thereby encouraging more people to take action.

To ensure these legislative demands are heeded and implemented, we plan to mobilize the community to put public pressure on lawmakers through petitions, letter-writing campaigns, and community rallies. At the same time, we will prepare concise, data-driven policy briefs to show lawmakers the urgency of the fentanyl crisis and clarify the cost-effectiveness of legislative interventions to bolster support among policymakers. In addition, we will build stakeholder coalitions with public health organizations, law enforcement agencies, and advocacy groups to collectively advance these legislative agendas by forming a unified voice.

Through these tactics, we aim to build a solid legal support system. A comprehensive response to the fentanyl crisis, from education to prevention to law enforcement, will provide continued protection for the youth population and lay the foundation for long-term community development.

TIMELINE

A brief timeline of the whole project



Measurement:

Educational impact

- Pre- and post-education tests were administered to participating students to measure cognitive gains. The goal is that at least 75% of students demonstrate significant cognitive gains, including recognizing counterfeit drugs and coping with overdose risks.
- Measure engagement data on social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat), including number of views, shares, comments, and hashtag usage (e.g., #FakePillsRealDanger). Goal: 100,000 exposures and 10,000 direct interactions by December 2025

Community Resource Mobilization

- Track the number of fentanyl test strips and naloxone kits distributed in at-risk communities. The goal is to have 5,000 test strips and 1,000 naloxone kits distributed by December 2025. Monitor utilization of these resources through follow-up surveys.
- Count the total number of participants in community lectures and support groups. The goal is that Cumulatively, all events will have at least 1,500 participants. Post-event surveys will assess participant satisfaction with the resources and activities and their perceived value.

Legislative Progress

- Track progress on three legislative proposals, including fentanyl education in the K-12 curriculum and increased regulation of illegal drug transactions on social media. Milestone: passage of at least one legislative proposal by December 2025

- Count the number of petitions signed and letters sent to legislators. Goal: 10,000 signatures and letters submitted. Monitor participation at public meetings and legislative advocacy events

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