

Deaths from heroin, opioid drugs in US rise sharply

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The Obama administration on Tuesday emphasized the need for funding to treat opioid and heroin addiction, releasing new statistics showing explosive growth in overdose deaths.

From 2010 to 2014, the number of [heroin](#) overdose deaths in the United States more than tripled, while deaths from opioid drugs such as fentanyl—which killed the singer Prince—almost doubled, according to a new report by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Drug overdoses now kill more Americans than car crashes.

"The death and destruction connected to heroin and opioids is indeed unprecedented and horrific," DEA Acting Administrator Chuck Rosenberg said in a statement. "The problem is enormous and growing."

More than 16,000 died in 2014 alone from heroin and opioid drug abuse. Nearly half a million people that year were addicted to heroin.

Heroin and opioid abuse are related.

Addiction to an [opioid](#) drug such as Oxycodone, Hydrocodone and Methadone—three drugs most commonly involved in overdoses—can lead to heroin addiction when the prescription painkiller is no longer available.

Officials say the phenomenon is fueling drug-related violence and crime.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, heroin-related deaths have risen most acutely in the US Midwest—a region encompassing states such as Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

The White House, which is asking Congress for \$1.1 billion to fund treatment programs across the country, sought to underscore the crisis in the Midwest by inviting officials from Wisconsin to speak with reporters on a conference call.

The state is home to House Speaker Paul Ryan, a Republican who will play a key role in deciding the fate of Obama's funding request.

"We find that if we get to the individuals before they become so dependent upon this (that) they either lose their lives or turn to crime, we're going to really, really improve the situation," said Tom Barrett, mayor of Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city.

Addicts often have trouble getting into treatment programs, according to officials, because there are too few of them.

When treatment is available, patients often struggle with costs because health insurance programs offer no coverage or inadequate coverage.

Bradley Wentlandt, police chief in the Milwaukee suburb of Greenfield, spoke of one family that lost their retirement savings and took out two mortgages on their home to pay for their son's treatment.

"He started at age 16 when a friend shared a single Vicodin pill," Wentlandt said.

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