

# Strategies to combat the opioid epidemic

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The opioid epidemic is ravaging lives and tearing families apart. Overdose deaths from heroin, fentanyl and misused prescription painkillers have tripled in the past 15 years. *Chemical & Engineering News*, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society, explores how abuse-deterrent and novel formulations for painkillers in addition to crime-fighting tools to quickly identify opioids could help curb the crisis.

Oxycontin made its debut in 1996 as a prescription pain treatment. By 2004, it had become a leading drug of abuse in the U.S., C&EN reports. To help curb the crisis, drugmakers have begun formulating opioid pills with special coatings or infusions that would make them harder to misuse. But these abuse-deterrent opioids are nearly double the price of the original formulation - literally a high price for patients who need the medications for relief from extreme pain. And whether they effectively reduce [opioid misuse](#) remains to be seen. In other pharmaceutical efforts to help combat the epidemic, some labs are looking to replace opioids altogether with novel and equally effective painkillers.

On another front in this fight, scientists are

developing powerful opioid detectors to help law enforcement officers quickly identify the drugs on the street and minimize officers' own risk of exposure. Powders can easily spill onto clothing or become airborne, increasing the risk of accidental inhalation or ingestion by [law enforcement officers](#) and lab technicians. With new instruments at their disposal, police do not even need to open a bag or come into contact with the drug to identify it.

**More information:** ["Looking beyond opioids for safer pain relief"](#)

["Powerful detection technology for powerful new street drugs"](#)

["Abuse-deterrent opioids: Worth the effort and cost?"](#)

["How chemists are responding to the opioid epidemic"](#)

Provided by American Chemical Society

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