



**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**  
**OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY**  
Washington, D.C. 20503

**“Lives Worth Living: Addressing the Fentanyl Crisis,  
Protecting Critical Lifelines, and Combatting  
Discrimination Against Those with Disabilities”**

Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Health  
United States House of Representatives

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10:00 a.m.

Statement of  
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For Release Upon Delivery

## ***Introduction***

Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Eshoo, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on the ever-changing illicit drug environment we face in the United States, which in the last year has claimed more than 107,000<sup>1</sup> lives and torn families and communities apart, as well as the Biden-Harris Administration's work to reduce the availability of illicit fentanyl in the United States, expand access to addiction treatment, and save American lives.

## ***The Administration's Approach***

Over the past two years, the Biden-Harris Administration has undertaken a comprehensive evidence-based approach to reduce drug-related deaths, expand access to treatment for substance use disorder, and target the global production and trafficking of synthetic opioids, like illicit fentanyl, which kill tens of thousands of Americans each year.

President Biden's inaugural *National Drug Control Strategy*, released in 2022, relies on the best evidence and data we have available, and sets out a whole-of-government approach to attack the two drivers of the opioid overdose epidemic: untreated addiction, and the drug trafficking profits that fuel this crisis. The Administration's approach addresses both the public health aspects of this crisis as

well as its national security, law enforcement, and economic dimensions, because addressing this problem holistically is the best approach to prevent overdose deaths and achieve long term and sustainable success against a problem that has vexed the nation for three decades.

In terms of public health, we are working to greatly expand access to addiction treatment, harm reduction, youth substance use prevention, and recovery support services. Much of this work is being done in partnership with the Congress, and I want to thank the members of this Committee and the Congress at large for your support of numerous pieces of legislation helping to address this crisis, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the bipartisan omnibus government funding bill, the latter of which included key provisions to help lower barriers to treatment and deliver necessary tools and resources to our communities to address the overdose crisis, such as the bipartisan Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment Act, or MAT Act, and the bipartisan Medication Access and Training Expansion Act, or MATE Act. Thanks to the MAT Act, prescribers across the country will be able to treat their patients who have opioid use disorder with buprenorphine, a medication proven to help people achieve recovery, without obtaining additional federal licensing. I also commend the Committee for beginning this Congress by focusing on the fentanyl threat, both with last month's roundtables featuring families affected by it and with today's hearing.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy has also funded the development of a number of model state laws to help local jurisdictions across the country expand access to naloxone, improve treatment in jails and prisons, and deploy settlement funds from the various opioid lawsuits effectively, among others. Similarly, ONDCP has worked with our partners across the government to remove barriers to accessing naloxone, make permanent the COVID-19 related flexibilities that expanded access to treatment, and support people in recovery.

And as much as this is a public health challenge, it is also a national security issue that directly affects the public safety and economic prosperity of the United States. It is a fact that the vast majority of the substances harming Americans are produced outside the United States and brought across our borders and into our communities through a variety of means, affecting the health, safety, and prosperity of the nation as a whole.

To address this very real threat, we have taken a new and more comprehensive approach to disrupt the production of these substances in other countries, interdict their global movement, and target the trafficker profits and operating capital that sustains this global illicit enterprise.

Disrupting the flow of drugs into the United States is important not only to keep them from harming our citizens, but it is especially important as the means to

allow our historic investments in public health interventions to take hold. The simple truth is, if it is easier to get illicit drugs in America than it is to get treatment, we will not be able to bring this crisis to a close.

To address the various facets of the illicit drug challenge and undercut the threat *before* it reaches our communities, we have broadened our approach to focus on Commercial Disruption. In this context, we are pursuing Commercial Disruption through a deliberate and coordinated whole-of-government effort that focuses and synchronizes all the national policy levers to disrupt the global illicit synthetic drug production and trafficking enterprise. This includes strategically targeting criminal facilitators and enablers, and the targeting of key vulnerabilities in the illicit fentanyl supply chain to maximize our impact across the drug producers' and traffickers' spectrum of capabilities.

Through Commercial Disruption, we are targeting not only the finished drugs themselves and those who sell them, but also the raw materials and machinery used to produce them, the commercial shipping that moves these items around the world, and the illicit financial structures that allow this global business to operate and allows drug producers and traffickers the ability to enjoy the profits and benefits of their illicit business.

In December 2021, President Biden signed two Executive Orders to provide the Federal Government with expanded tools and capabilities to go after traffickers, criminal facilitators, and their illicit profits. Thus far the Department of the Treasury has used the expanded counter narcotics sanctions authority to impose sanctions on dozens of targets around the globe involved in the illicit drug trade, including illicitly manufactured fentanyl.<sup>2</sup>

We are also continuing the necessary and difficult work of interdicting illicit drugs at our borders and within communities across the country. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers and agents, as well as the 33 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTAs) covering all 50 states, seizures of illicit fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine are all up significantly compared to 2021.

In fiscal year 2022, CBP seized nearly 15,000 pounds of fentanyl, nearly 2,000 pounds of heroin, 175,000 pounds of methamphetamine, and more than 70,000 pounds of cocaine.<sup>3</sup> And during the same period within the United States, our HIDTA Task Forces seized more than 26,000 pounds of illicit fentanyl, nearly 6,500 pounds of heroin, more than 335,000 pounds of meth, and nearly 370,000 pounds of cocaine, representing nearly \$9 billion of profits denied to drug traffickers.<sup>4</sup>

These seizures permanently removed these drugs from the illicit supply chain, thereby saving lives and denying profits and critical operating capital to drug trafficking organizations.

In last year's Budget request, President Biden called for a funding increase to support the work of CBP and the Drug Enforcement Administration so they can continue their vital work in keeping our nation safe from these dangerous drugs.<sup>5</sup>

Our CBP officials, and our 33 HIDTAs nationwide, deserve our thanks and appreciation for all their hard work in preventing drug poisoning deaths and holding traffickers accountable. I also want to thank the Congress and the members of this Committee for your long history of strong support for our HIDTA program. HIDTA has played a critical role in our success thus far and will continue to be a critical part of our work going forward.

In December, the Congress passed a two-year extension of the scheduling of fentanyl-related substances, which controls these substances as a class and provides the necessary authorities for our law enforcement entities to prevent the production and trafficking of all potential fentanyl analogues. Thank you for your leadership and partnership on extending this authority, and we look forward to working with you in making this class scheduling action permanent.

While seizures and arrests are critically important, this problem does not begin or end at a United States border. The production and trafficking of these drugs is a global problem, and United States leadership at the global level is absolutely essential to saving lives. While drug trafficking is harmful in its own right, and imperils the health and well-being of our citizens, it is also part of a larger complex of criminal behaviors that have negative effects not only in the United States but in this hemisphere and the rest of the world.

In Fall 2021, in coordination with the U.S. interagency, Secretary of State Blinken requested that the United Nations consider placing international controls on three fentanyl precursors. As a result of U.S. leadership, the March 2022 UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided unanimously to internationally control these three chemicals used by drug traffickers to produce illicit fentanyl, thereby reducing their presence in the illicit supply chain.<sup>6</sup>

As you are all well aware, synthetic opioids like fentanyl and its analogues are produced using precursor chemicals made available by criminal elements, often in The People's Republic of China, that are shipped to Mexico where they are used to produce illicit fentanyl or one of its analogues. This fentanyl is either sold in powder form or pressed into the counterfeit pills that have poisoned so many Americans. These drugs are then either smuggled across our southern border,



typically through the existing ports of entry, or shipped into the United States through the mail or through express consignment carriers.

The Administration is working bilaterally with our international partners, particularly Mexico, The People's Republic of China, India, and others, and internationally through forums such as the North American Drug Dialogue and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, to address the global challenge of illicit synthetic opioid production and trafficking. The President placed fentanyl as a key topic on his agenda at the recent North American Leaders Summit, and the United States, Mexico, and Canada agreed to increase information sharing and actionable intelligence on chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of fentanyl and other synthetic drugs.

### ***Conclusion***

I am pleased to say that as a result of our work thus far, in preventing illicit fentanyl from reaching our communities, preventing the harm caused by these dangerous drugs, and expanding access to the treatment so many Americans need, there are signs of progress.

We have now seen five straight months where overdose numbers have decreased, a 2.57% overall decrease from its high point in March 2022<sup>7</sup>. It is a sign

of hope, and at the very least is sparing some families from going through the devastating loss of loved ones. However, we still have a very long way to go.

The Administration's leadership on this critical issue, the close collaboration among Federal departments and agencies, and the work the members of this Committee and your colleagues in Congress have kept this issue at the forefront of our national consciousness and are changing the trajectory of this particularly complex national security, criminal justice, and public health challenge. We have much work ahead of us, and your partnership will be as critical in the months ahead as it has been thus far.

On behalf of Dr. Gupta and the men and women of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, I would like to thank the subcommittee and your Congressional colleagues for your foresight and leadership on this incredibly difficult issue. Ending the opioid crisis demands the best efforts of us all: the entirety of the federal government; states, tribes, and local communities; private sector partners and stakeholders; and the Congress, in the spirit of bipartisanship.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy looks forward to continuing its work with this Committee, the Congress, and our other partners to disrupt the production and trafficking of these dangerous drugs, prevent drug overdoses and poisonings, and save American lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NCHS. “Vital Statistics Rapid Release: Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts.” January 11, 2023. Accessed January 11, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy. “Press Release: Dr. Rahul Gupta Statement on New Sanctions Announced by Treasury Department to Counter Transnational Criminal Organizations and Illicit Drug Trafficking of Fentanyl.” November 15, 2022. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2022/11/15/dr-rahul-gupta-statement-on-new-sanctions-announced-by-treasury-department-to-counter-transnational-criminal-organizations-and-illicit-drug-trafficking-of-fentanyl/#\\_ftn1](https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2022/11/15/dr-rahul-gupta-statement-on-new-sanctions-announced-by-treasury-department-to-counter-transnational-criminal-organizations-and-illicit-drug-trafficking-of-fentanyl/#_ftn1)

<sup>3</sup> Customs and Border Protection. “CBP Drug Seizure Statistics Dashboard, FY2023.” (Dashboard filtered for FY2022 only.) Accessed January 22, 2023. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

<sup>4</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy. “Press Release: Dr. Gupta and Law Enforcement Officials Announce New Domestic Seizure Data from ONDCP’S High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas.” January 23, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/01/23/dr-gupta-and-law-enforcement-officials-announce-new-domestic-seizure-data-from-ondcps-high-intensity-drug-trafficking-areas/>

<sup>5</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy. “FY 2023 Budget Highlights.” March 22, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FY-2023-Budget-Highlights.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy. “Press Release: At Urging of U.S., UN Commission Acts Against ‘Precursor’ Chemicals Used to Produce Illicit Fentanyl.” March 16, 2022. Accessed January 22, 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2022/03/16/at-urging-of-u-s-un-commission-acts-against-precursor-chemicals-used-to-produce-illicit-fentanyl/>

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NCHS. “Vital Statistics Rapid Release: Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts.” January 11, 2023. Accessed January 11, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>