

# Estimated Impact of Investing Opioid Settlement Funds in Evidence-Based Solutions

The opioid epidemic has laid a path of devastation and trauma across the country, in terms of lives lost, communities impacted, and people in need of help. Approximately 6.1 million people<sup>1</sup> over the age of 12 in the United States suffer from Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) each year. In 2023, over 81,000 people<sup>2</sup> in the United States died from an opioid overdose. Overdose deaths from opioids accounts for more than 75% of all drug overdose deaths.<sup>3</sup> The opioid epidemic has impacted hundreds of thousands of families — approximately half of all people who have died from an opioid overdose since 2011 had a child.<sup>4</sup> The ongoing opioid settlements present a critical opportunity to intervene in this epidemic and address these losses.

Over the next two decades, state and local governments are expected to receive over \$55 billion<sup>5</sup> as part of legal settlements. Such a sizable influx has the ability to make a measurable impact on overdose rates, and build on the [promising trends](#) researchers have found in the declining death rates from drug overdoses. Yet while there are numerous strategies that have been proven to prevent, mitigate, and respond to the consequences of drug use, there are indications that these funds are not being spent on strategies proven to address the opioid crisis.<sup>6</sup> With ample resources and evidence of effectiveness, governments need to take concrete actions to invest in what works. The stakes — and opportunities — are tremendous.

## Potential for Impact

Results for America estimated what the human impact would be if 50% of all settlement funds were invested in four sample strategies that have been proven to work. If half of opioid settlement funds were specifically directed towards evidence-based solutions, we could expect:

**120K**

Fewer people misusing prescription or illegally made fentanyl

**90K+**

Fewer opioid overdose deaths

**75K+**

People remaining opioid free

*For more information on methodology and assumptions of these estimates, please see the next page.*

## What This Means

State and local governments, opioid settlement councils, and others have the resources, funds, and available evidence to change the course of the opioid epidemic and save thousands of lives. However, they need to move from talking about using research to putting it in action.

## Next Steps

Governments overseeing opioid settlement funds should:

1. Credibly define what “evidence-based” means in statute, grant materials and budget processes.
2. Require or prioritize evidence-based practices in the statutes, grant materials and budgets processes that govern settlement funds

Want to learn more about how to do this with settlement funds in your community?

Check out [results4america.org/tools/opioid-settlement-resources](https://results4america.org/tools/opioid-settlement-resources) or email us at [settlementsolutions@results4america.org](mailto:settlementsolutions@results4america.org).

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## Assumptions/Methodology

This is an estimate. While we made reasonable assumptions and believe it is credible, it does not rely on sophisticated methods, nor does it take into account a variety of variables or complicating factors. We considered four strategies that have been identified by credible research organizations as proven to work: Drug-Free Housing<sup>7</sup>, Naloxone Distribution and Access Programs<sup>8</sup>, Fentanyl Test Strip Distribution Programs<sup>9</sup>, and Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access<sup>10</sup>. We then identified cost information (adjusted for inflation) and the estimated change in outcomes for Drug-Free Housing<sup>11</sup>, Naloxone Distribution and Access Programs<sup>12</sup>, Fentanyl Test Strip Distribution Programs<sup>13</sup>, and MAT Access<sup>14</sup>. We assumed \$44,443,857,046.14 was the total value of settlement funds, based on the sum of settlement funds going to state and local governments. We did not adjust for net present value or future inflation. To get the number of people served, we divided the allocated dollars in half and divided it across the identified interventions (described below). We then applied the identified cost per intervention. Finally, we applied the impact information to the number of people served.

We assumed Drug-Free Housing would receive 16.6% of the settlement fund, allowing 211,563 people to receive the two-year drug-free housing intervention over the 10 years. Naloxone Distribution and Access Programs would receive 0.2% of the settlement fund, distributing 683,000 kits nationwide each year for 10 years. Fentanyl Test Strip Distribution Programs would receive 16.6% of the settlement fund, providing 1,684,401 people with one test strip a day for 10 years. Medication-Assisted Treatment Access would receive 16.6% of the settlement fund, providing 82,984 people with a monthly prescription for methadone for 10 years. To get the number of people served, we divided the theoretically allocated amount by the cost per intervention.

**Do you have suggestions for how we could improve this estimate?**  
**Please email us at [settlementsolutions@results4america.org](mailto:settlementsolutions@results4america.org).**

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## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/information-drug-class/information-about-medications-opioid-use-disorder-mou>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2024/20240515.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2024/20240515.htm)

<sup>3</sup> NIDA. 2014, May 14. Drug overdose deaths rates. Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>.

<sup>4</sup> NIDA. 2024, May 8. More than 321,000 U.S. children lost a parent to drug overdose from 2011 to 2021. Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/2024/05/more-than-321000-us-children-lost-a-parent-to-drug-overdose-from-2011-to-2021>.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Minhee, J.D. 2024. [OpioidSettlementTracker.com](https://opioidsettlementtracker.com).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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