


In Fentanyl Crisis, Signs of Progress

The death rate for drug-overdose deaths dropped from 31.3 deaths per 100,000 people in 2023 to 23.1 per 100,000 people in 2024, according to the CDC. Teens and young adults saw the most significant declines in those types of deaths, with a 37% drop for 15- to 24-year-olds between 2023 and 2024.

The unprecedented drop in drug-overdose deaths shows promising signs of progress against the national fentanyl crisis, which has fueled a surge in drug-related deaths. Synthetic opioids, largely fentanyl, were involved in 72,776 overdose deaths in 2023, compared with 47,735 deaths in 2024.

It is possible some policy changes including increased distribution of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone and more accessible clinics in rural communities have helped decrease the number of drug-overdose deaths in the U.S.

Epidemiologists and academics have warned that possible cuts in federal funding to outreach and prevention programs could hinder this progress. Earlier this month, the Department of Health and Human Services reversed around \$2 billion in grant cuts to substance abuse and mental-health programs a day after notifying thousands of funding recipients that their grants were terminated.

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U.S. Life Expectancy Reaches All-Time High

BY JENNIFER CALFAS

Life expectancy in the U.S. reached a record high in 2024, following a substantial decline of drug-overdose deaths, according to figures released by the federal government Thursday.

The life expectancy at birth for the average American was 79 years old in 2024, up 0.6 year from the year prior, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. The increase signals a rebound from declines in life expectancy during the coronavirus pandemic and progress in combating the opioid crisis.

The agency reported that deaths related to drug overdose decreased by more than 26% between 2023 and 2024, marking the largest year-to-year drop in those types of fatalities recorded by the federal government.

"You've got those two things working together: improvements coming out of the pandemic and then declines in overdose deaths," said Robert Anderson, chief of the Statistical Analysis and Surveillance Branch at the National Center for Health Statistics. "The result is increased life expectancy to a level a little bit higher than what we saw pre-pandemic."

The figures released Thursday reflect the most recent final federal data on U.S. mortality rates. Provisional data of drug-overdose deaths in the U.S. through August 2025 show a continued decline in those fatalities.

The average life expectancy at birth for women and men in 2024 increased to 81.4 years and 76.5 years, respectively, the report said. While the U.S. has made progress in lengthening its life expectancy, it still lags behind peer nations. The drug-overdose epidemic and stalled progress in cardiovascular disease mortality rates have played a role in slowing the U.S.'s momentum, Anderson said.

"Seventy-nine years is impressive for us but not so much for most of these other developed countries," Anderson said.

The coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S. harder than some other peer countries, Anderson said. U.S. life expectancy decreased by 1.8 years during the pandemic in 2020, with Covid-19 becoming the third-leading cause of death at the time.

The overall mortality rate in the U.S., adjusted for age, dropped in 2024 by nearly 4%, from 750.5 deaths per 100,000 Americans in 2023 to a rate of 722.1 deaths per 100,000 in 2024. Death rates decreased across races and ethnicities. Heart disease, cancer and unintentional injuries remained the top-three leading causes of deaths, the agency said, while Covid-19 was no longer among the top 10 causes of death. Death by suicide was the 10th-leading cause of death in 2024, the report said.

The death rate decreased for people among almost all age groups between 2023 and 2024, according to the report. The death rate for children and teens from 5 to 14 years old didn't notably change between the two years, the report said.

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