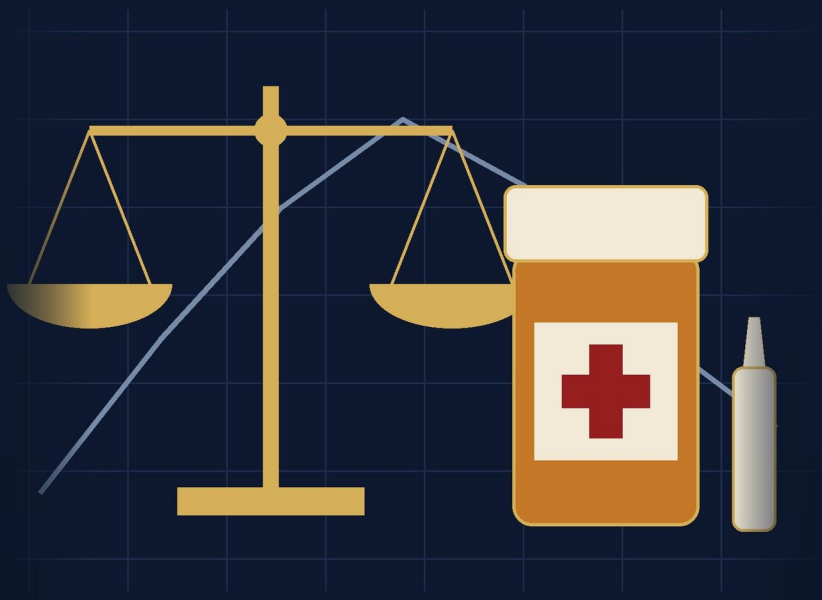
A PLAIN-ENGLISH FACT CHECK

DRUGS, ADDICTION AND THE LAW

What the Records Show



FENTANYL | THE BORDER | MARIJUANA | TREATMENT | THE COURTS

Fentanyl, Marijuana, Treatment and the Courts

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY Enterprises

DRUGS, ADDICTION AND THE LAW

What the Records Show About Fentanyl, Marijuana, Treatment and the Courts

Overdose deaths, the border, marijuana laws, treatment that works, and the claims people make about all of it

Andrew Dominguez

Fact Check Series

Trinfinity Enterprises

Drugs, Addiction and the Law: What the Records Show About Fentanyl, Marijuana, Treatment and the Courts

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The information in this book stops at November 18, 2026. Each figure comes from the newest report I could open on that date and carries the date of its source. Drug laws, treatment rules and overdose numbers change often, so check the sources named in the footnotes before you make a decision.

This book is for general information only. It is not medical or legal advice. Talk with a doctor, a licensed treatment provider or an attorney about your own situation. If you or someone you love needs help now, call the free, confidential National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357 (1-800-662-HELP), open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. If someone is not breathing or will not wake up, call 911.

Questions and corrections: andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com

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Recovery notice. This course shares my own story and a faith-based path to recovery. It is not therapy, counseling, medical care, or addiction treatment, and it does not replace them. Stopping alcohol or some drugs all at once can be dangerous, even deadly, so talk with a doctor before you quit. If you or someone you love is thinking about suicide or is in crisis, call or text 988. In an emergency, call 911. For help finding treatment, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357, free and open around the clock.

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Introduction: How to Read This Book

The information in this book stops at November 18, 2026.

I have been sober since May 29, 2020. I know from the inside what addiction does to a person and to the people who love them, and I know that the way out is real. That is one reason I wanted this book in the series. The other reason is that few subjects draw louder claims or worse numbers than drugs. Fentanyl, the border, marijuana, treatment, prison: everyone has an opinion, and many of the "facts" passed around are wrong.

Some of the real facts are better than most people think. Drug overdose deaths in the United States fell for the third year in a row in 2025, to an estimated 69,973, down from a peak of nearly 110,000 in 2022.[1] That is still about 190 Americans a day. Other facts cut against what people on every side like to say. Most people sentenced in federal court for trafficking fentanyl are American citizens.[2] Medicines for opioid addiction cut the risk of dying by more than half in one large study, yet most people who survive an overdose never get them.[3]

I wrote this book to put the records in one place: how many people are dying and why the numbers are falling, how drugs get into the country and who carries them, what the law says from the federal government down to Nevada, what treatment the evidence supports, and how the courts handle drug crimes. Every number traces to a source you can open and check. The book does not take a side. It lays out what the records show and lets you decide what they mean.

What this book covers

The book has six parts.

- **Part One** covers the toll: overdose deaths, fentanyl, and drug use among adults and teenagers.
- **Part Two** covers how drugs get into the country: where fentanyl is made, who carries it, and what the United States and China have done about it.
- **Part Three** covers the law: how the federal government classifies drugs, marijuana laws by state, the 2026 federal change for medical marijuana, Nevada's rules, drug crime in federal court, and Oregon's experiment with decriminalization.
- **Part Four** covers treatment that works: the medicines, naloxone, and where to find help.
- **Part Five** tests common claims and gives each one a verdict.
- **Part Six** shows where things stand on November 18, 2026, what nobody knows yet, and plain steps for families.

At the back you will find a timeline, a glossary and the full list of sources.

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[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026. Mike Stobbe, Associated Press (published by Fortune), "Overdose deaths in U.S. have been dropping for over 2 years, the longest decline in decades", January 15, 2026. https://fortune.com/2026/01/15/overdose-deaths-in-u-s-have-been-dropping-for-over-2-years-the-longest-decline-in-decades/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[2] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Fentanyl Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Fentanyl_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[3] National Institutes of Health, "Methadone and buprenorphine reduce risk of death after opioid overdose (news release on Larochelle et al., Annals of Internal Medicine)", June 19, 2018. https://nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/methadone-buprenorphine-reduce-risk-death-after-opioid-overdose. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Guns, Crime and Punishment in America, another book in this series, covers crime and prisons broadly. My book New Beginnings for Families is written for families living with a loved one's addiction. This book covers drugs and drug policy.

What this book does not do

This book is not medical or legal advice. It will not tell you which treatment is right for you or your family member. Talk with a doctor or a licensed treatment provider. If you or someone you love needs help now, the free, confidential National Helpline is 1-800-662-4357, and Part Four lists other help lines.[4]

The date the information stops at

Overdose numbers come out late and change as death investigations finish. The government's estimate for 2025 came out in May 2026, and it is still labeled provisional.[5] The cutoff for this book is **November 18, 2026**. You will see the year of every figure in the text and in each table.

Where the facts come from

Every factual sentence or table in this book traces back to a source in a footnote. Each footnote gives the source's title, its author or agency, its date, a link and the date I opened it. To keep pages readable, I put one footnote at the end of a paragraph or table, listing every source used in it.

I used sources in this order of preference:

Tier	What it includes	Examples
1. Primary and official	The government's own records, laws and data	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), U.S. Sentencing Commission (USSC), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board
2. Nonpartisan analysis	Research groups that do not lobby for a side	Congressional Research Service (CRS), Pew Research Center, KFF
3. Scholarly	Peer-reviewed and university research	Annals of Internal Medicine, Portland State University
4. Journalism and law firm alerts	News reports and law firms' client alerts, used to point back to primary sources	Associated Press, Foley and Lardner, Morgan Lewis
5. Advocacy groups	Groups that argue a side	Used only to show what a side says, or where no neutral

[4] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "SAMHSA National Helpline", page updated March 25, 2026. https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/helplines/national-helpline. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[5] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Tier	What it includes	Examples
		source was found, always labeled

I do not use social media posts, chain emails or anonymous web pages as evidence. When a claim spread that way, I describe it and then check it against real records.

Facts, interpretations and unknowns

I keep three kinds of statements apart.

- **Confirmed facts** are things the records show, such as the number of overdose deaths in 2025.
- **Interpretations** are what someone makes of the facts, such as why deaths are falling. When I give one, I say whose interpretation it is.
- **Unknowns** are things the records don't settle yet. When I could not confirm something, I mark it **[Not verified]** and say what I searched.

The four verdicts

In Part Five, I test common claims. I use only four verdicts, the same ones used in every book in this series:

- **True:** The records support the claim as stated.
- **Partly true:** Part of the claim holds up, but it leaves out something important or overstates it.
- **False:** The records contradict the claim.
- **Inconclusive:** The evidence is not strong enough to say either way, or it is too soon to know.

Each verdict comes with the evidence, so you can judge it for yourself.

A word about words

I use "addiction" and "substance use disorder" to mean the same thing. Substance use disorder is the medical term doctors use. I use "person with an addiction" rather than labels, because every number in this book is made of people, and I was one of them.

Part One: The Toll

Chapter 1: Overdose Deaths, Up and Then Down

For most of the last two decades, the overdose numbers only went one way. Deaths peaked at nearly 110,000 in 2022.[6] Then the curve turned.

Year	Estimated overdose deaths	Change
2022	nearly 110,000 (peak)	
2023	slightly lower	small decline
2024	81,313	down about 27 percent, the largest one-year drop on record
2025	69,973 (provisional)	down almost 14 percent

[7]

Deaths involving opioids fell from an estimated 55,296 in 2024 to 44,564 in 2025. Deaths involving cocaine and stimulants such as methamphetamine fell too.[8] The Congressional Research Service, citing CDC data, reports about 37,393 deaths involving synthetic opioids, mostly fentanyl, in 2025, down 52 percent from a peak of 77,695 in the twelve months ending June 2023.[9]

The drop was not the same everywhere. Rhode Island, New York, North Carolina, Alabama and Vermont saw declines of 25 percent or more in 2025, while New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado saw increases of 10 percent or more.[10]

Why are deaths falling?

No one has a full answer yet, and anyone who gives you a single reason is guessing. The explanations that experts discuss include wider use of naloxone, more people on addiction medicines, changes in the drug supply, pressure on fentanyl production and smuggling, and the grim fact that many of the people most at risk already died in the worst years. The Associated Press noted that a past dip in deaths, in

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[6] Mike Stobbe, Associated Press (published by Fortune), "Overdose deaths in U.S. have been dropping for over 2 years, the longest decline in decades", January 15, 2026. https://fortune.com/2026/01/15/overdose-deaths-in-u-s-have-been-dropping-for-over-2-years-the-longest-decline-in-decades/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[7] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026. Mike Stobbe, Associated Press (published by Fortune), "Overdose deaths in U.S. have been dropping for over 2 years, the longest decline in decades", January 15, 2026. https://fortune.com/2026/01/15/overdose-deaths-in-u-s-have-been-dropping-for-over-2-years-the-longest-decline-in-decades/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[8] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[9] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[10] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

2018, was tied in part to Chinese regulation of a fentanyl-type drug.[11] **[Not verified]**: a study that measures how much each factor contributed to the 2023 to 2025 decline. I found none that settles it.

The legal drug in the same picture

Overdose numbers leave out the most widely used drug in the country. The CDC estimates that excessive drinking caused an average of 178,307 deaths a year in 2020 and 2021, up about 29 percent from 137,927 a year in 2016 and 2017. That works out to about 488 deaths a day. About two thirds of those deaths came from long-term causes such as liver disease, heart disease and cancer, and the rest from short-term causes such as crashes, poisonings and falls. Deaths rose faster among women (up 34.7 percent) than among men (up 26.8 percent).[12] These are two-year averages, measured a different way from the overdose counts above, so the two numbers should not be added together or ranked against each other as if they were the same kind of count.

Chapter 2: Fentanyl

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, made in a lab rather than from the poppy plant. It has real medical uses in hospitals and as a prescription patch. The fentanyl killing Americans is made illegally, mostly in Mexico, from chemicals bought abroad (Chapter 5).[13]

What makes illegal fentanyl so deadly is its strength and the fact that buyers often don't know they are taking it. It is pressed into fake pills made to look like prescription painkillers or anxiety medicine, and it is mixed into other drugs. In 2025, fentanyl and other synthetic opioids were involved in roughly half of all overdose deaths.[14]

New drugs keep appearing in the supply. In 2026 China warned about medetomidine, an animal sedative, and the chemical tartaric acid, as substances being diverted into the drug trade, and the international narcotics board listed 183 fentanyl-related substances with no known legitimate use as of April 2026.[15]

The Purdue settlement

Many families trace their story back to a prescription bottle, not a street pill. The best known legal case over prescription opioids is the bankruptcy of Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin. On November

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[11] Mike Stobbe, Associated Press (published by Fortune), "Overdose deaths in U.S. have been dropping for over 2 years, the longest decline in decades", January 15, 2026. https://fortune.com/2026/01/15/overdose-deaths-in-u-s-have-been-dropping-for-over-2-years-the-longest-decline-in-decades/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[12] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (MMWR), "Deaths from Excessive Alcohol Use - United States, 2016-2021 (MMWR 73(8):154-161)", February 29, 2024. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7308a1.htm. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[13] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[14] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[15] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

18, 2025, the New York Attorney General announced that a federal bankruptcy judge had confirmed Purdue's plan in a bench ruling. The plan carries a $7.4 billion settlement. According to the release, the Sackler family, Purdue's owners, will pay $1.5 billion and Purdue about $900 million in the first payment, expected in early 2026, with more paid in installments over as long as 15 years. The money is meant for addiction treatment, prevention and recovery programs. The company becomes a new business owned by an independent nonprofit foundation, the Sacklers will have no further involvement with it, and a court order bars it from marketing its opioid products and from lobbying.[16] **[Not verified]**: the new company's name and whether the plan includes any admission of wrongdoing by the Sacklers. The source I read does not say.

Chapter 3: Teenagers

The national Monitoring the Future survey, run by the University of Michigan for the National Institutes of Health, asked 23,726 students in 2025 about drug use. The news was mostly good.[17]

Past-year use, 2025	8th grade	10th grade	12th grade
Alcohol	11%	24%	41%
Marijuana	8%	16%	26%
Nicotine vaping	9%	14%	20%
Cocaine	0.6%	0.7%	1.4%

[16] New York State Office of the Attorney General, "Attorney General James Secures Approval of Purdue Bankruptcy Plan (press release)", November 18, 2025. https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2025/attorney-general-james-secures-approval-purdue-bankruptcy-plan. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[17] National Institutes of Health, "Reported use of most drugs remains low among U.S. teens (Monitoring the Future 2025, news release)", December 17, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/reported-use-most-drugs-remains-low-among-us-teens. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Past-year use, 2025	8th grade	10th grade	12th grade
Heroin	0.5%	0.5%	0.9%

[18]

Most teens used nothing at all: 91 percent of 8th graders, 82 percent of 10th graders and 66 percent of 12th graders reported no marijuana, alcohol or nicotine in the past 30 days. Use of most drugs held steady from 2024. The exception was small but significant increases in heroin and cocaine use. The lead researcher said the rise "warrants close monitoring" but that levels remain "leagues below what they were decades ago."[19]

[18] National Institutes of Health, "Reported use of most drugs remains low among U.S. teens (Monitoring the Future 2025, news release)", December 17, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/reported-use-most-drugs-remains-low-among-us-teens. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[19] National Institutes of Health, "Reported use of most drugs remains low among U.S. teens (Monitoring the Future 2025, news release)", December 17, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/reported-use-most-drugs-remains-low-among-us-teens. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Two: How Drugs Get Into the Country

Chapter 4: Where Fentanyl Is Made

According to the State Department's 2025 narcotics report, cited by the Congressional Research Service in October 2026, the illegal fentanyl headed for the United States is now made chiefly in Mexico by drug trafficking organizations. The chemicals used to make it, called precursors, and the machines used to press pills come mainly from China and India, according to the U.S. intelligence community's 2026 threat assessment.[20]

China used to ship finished fentanyl directly. After China put the whole class of fentanyl-type drugs under control in 2019, CRS reports that "almost no fentanyl" has been detected entering the United States directly from China. The trade moved to chemicals instead.[21]

Chapter 5: China, Tariffs and Precursors

Fentanyl became part of the trade fight of 2025. The first tariffs of 2025 on China, Canada and Mexico were imposed under an emergency declared over fentanyl and the border. The Supreme Court struck those tariffs down in February 2026 because the emergency law used does not allow tariffs at all; the ruling did not address fentanyl itself. The full story is in this series' book Trade and Tariffs.[22]

Here are the steps China has taken, as reported by CRS:[23]

- **June 2025:** China completed the control of every fentanyl precursor on the international control list, and later added nitazenes, another family of powerful synthetic opioids.
- **October and November 2025:** after the meeting between the two presidents, China agreed to stop shipments of certain chemicals to North America and, for the first time, put export controls on 13 fentanyl precursors going to North America.
- **2026:** more export controls around the May and September 2026 meetings, a public warning about eight chemicals in May, and new legal guidelines for fentanyl crimes in September.

China's government argues that the core problem is American demand, and that U.S. tariffs hurt cooperation.[24]

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[20] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[21] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[22] Congressional Research Service, "Congressional and Presidential Authority to Impose Import Tariffs (R48435)", updated March 19, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-03-19_R48435_546b4dbd204a9808559490c906d5007dc446321c.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[23] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[24] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

On the U.S. side, a December 2025 executive order designated illegal fentanyl and its main precursors as weapons of mass destruction, Congress set aside at least $150 million for counter-fentanyl work in fiscal year 2026, and the 2026 defense bill included a law called the BUST Fentanyl Act.[25]

Chapter 6: Who Carries It

A common claim is that fentanyl is carried into the country by people crossing the border illegally. The federal court records say otherwise.

The U.S. Sentencing Commission reports on every person sentenced in federal court. In fiscal year 2025, 3,605 people were sentenced for trafficking fentanyl. Of them:[26]

- **84 percent were United States citizens.**
- 83 percent were men, and the average age was 35.
- 96 percent went to prison, with an average sentence of 79 months, up from 58 months in fiscal year 2021.
- The districts with the most cases were Arizona, Southern California, Oregon, New Jersey and Massachusetts.

The pattern has held for years. KFF, using the Sentencing Commission's fiscal year 2023 numbers, reported that 86.4 percent of those sentenced for fentanyl trafficking were U.S. citizens.[27]

These numbers count people caught, charged and sentenced in federal court, not everyone who smuggles drugs. They do not tell us how many smugglers are never caught or who they are. But among the people the federal government does convict, the large majority are Americans.

Chapter 7: What Gets Seized

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) seizes fentanyl at the border every day. KFF reported CBP fentanyl seizures rising from about 14,100 pounds in fiscal year 2022 to 26,700 pounds in fiscal year 2023.[28] **[Not verified]**: CBP's seizure totals for fiscal years 2025 and 2026 and the share caught at official ports of entry. I was not able to open CBP's statistics page or a reliable report of it before this book's cutoff.

Seizures are hard to read. A rise can mean more drugs are coming in, or that enforcement is catching more of them, or both. A fall can mean less is coming in or that smugglers have changed methods. Seizure numbers alone cannot tell you which.

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[25] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[26] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Fentanyl Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Fentanyl_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[27] KFF, "Most Sentenced for Trafficking Fentanyl are U.S. Citizens", September 20, 2024. https://www.kff.org/quick-insights/most-sentenced-for-trafficking-fentanyl-are-u-s-citizens/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[28] KFF, "Most Sentenced for Trafficking Fentanyl are U.S. Citizens", September 20, 2024. https://www.kff.org/quick-insights/most-sentenced-for-trafficking-fentanyl-are-u-s-citizens/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Three: The Law

Chapter 8: How the Federal Government Classifies Drugs

The Controlled Substances Act sorts drugs into five schedules. The schedule depends on how likely a drug is to be abused, whether it has an accepted medical use in the United States, and how much dependence it can cause. Here is how the DEA describes them in its 2026 guide.[29]

[29] Drug Enforcement Administration, "Drugs of Abuse: A DEA Resource Guide, 2026 Edition", 2026. https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2026-10/Drugs-Abuse-2026.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Schedule	What it means	Examples
I	High potential for abuse, no currently accepted medical use, lack of accepted safety under medical supervision	Heroin, LSD, GHB, marijuana (except as noted in Chapter 10)
II	High potential for abuse, accepted medical use (sometimes with severe restrictions), abuse may lead to	Fentanyl, morphine, methadone, hydrocodone, cocaine, methamphetamine, PCP

Schedule	What it means	Examples
	severe dependence	
III	Less potential for abuse than I and II, accepted medical use, moderate or low physical dependence or high psychological dependence	Anabolic steroids, codeine combined with aspirin or acetaminophen, some barbiturates
IV	Low potential for abuse compared with III, accepted	Alprazolam, clonazepam, diazepam

Schedule	What it means	Examples
	medical use, limited dependence	
V	Low potential for abuse compared with IV, accepted medical use, limited dependence	Cough medicines with small amounts of codeine

[30]

Two things surprise many people. Fentanyl is Schedule II, not Schedule I, because it is a real medicine used in hospitals; the fentanyl killing people is the same chemical made illegally. And marijuana was in Schedule I, alongside heroin, until part of it was moved in 2026.[31]

Chapter 9: Marijuana, State by State

Marijuana is where state and federal law split the most. As of May 2026, according to Pew Research Center's count from the National Conference of State Legislatures:[32]

Status	States
Legal for recreational and medical use	24 states and the District of Columbia
Medical use only, full programs	16 states
Medical use only, low-THC or CBD products	8 states: Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Wisconsin and Wyoming
Neither	2 states: Idaho and Kansas

[33]

More than half of Americans, 53 percent, live in a place where recreational marijuana is legal. In a Pew survey in January 2026, 55 percent of adults said marijuana should be legal for both medical and recreational use, 33 percent said for medical use only, and 11 percent said it should not be legal at all. Gallup found support for legalization at 64 percent in 2025, down from 70 percent in 2023 and up from 31 percent in 2000.[34]

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[30] Drug Enforcement Administration, "Drugs of Abuse: A DEA Resource Guide, 2026 Edition", 2026. https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2026-10/Drugs-Abuse-2026.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[31] Drug Enforcement Administration, "Drugs of Abuse: A DEA Resource Guide, 2026 Edition", 2026. https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2026-10/Drugs-Abuse-2026.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. Foley and Lardner (law firm client alert), "DEA Issues Long-Awaited Final Order Rescheduling Certain Marijuana Products to Schedule III: What It Means, What It Doesn't, and What Comes Next", April 23, 2026. https://www.foley.com/insights/publications/2026/04/dea-issues-long-awaited-final-order-rescheduling-certain-marijuana-products-to-schedule-iii-what-it-means-what-it-doesnt-and-what-comes-next/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[32] Pew Research Center, "Facts about marijuana", May 26, 2026. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/05/26/facts-about-marijuana/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[33] Pew Research Center, "Facts about marijuana", May 26, 2026. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/05/26/facts-about-marijuana/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Chapter 10: The 2026 Federal Change

Under federal law, marijuana has been a Schedule I drug, in the same category as heroin (Chapter 8). In 2026 that changed, but only in part.

After an executive order in December 2025, the Justice Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) issued a final order, announced April 23, 2026 and published in the Federal Register on April 28, 2026. It moved two things to Schedule III:[35]

- marijuana drug products approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and
- marijuana grown, made or sold under a **state medical marijuana license**.

Everything else stayed in Schedule I, including marijuana sold in state-licensed **recreational** stores. As one law firm put it, the order "does not broadly reclassify marijuana."[36]

The biggest practical effect is on taxes. A federal tax rule known as Section 280E kept businesses that sell Schedule I or II drugs from deducting normal business expenses. State medical marijuana businesses are no longer subject to it. Recreational-only businesses still are.[37]

A hearing on moving all marijuana to Schedule III ran from June 29 to July 15, 2026 before a DEA judge. As of September 24, 2026, the judge's recommendation had not been issued.[38] **[Not verified]**: whether a recommendation or final decision has come out since. Even if all marijuana moves to Schedule III, it would still be a federally controlled substance.[39]

Chapter 11: Nevada's Rules

Nevada voters approved recreational marijuana for adults 21 and older with Question 2 on November 8, 2016, and it became legal on January 1, 2017. The state Department of Taxation ran the program from

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[34] Pew Research Center, "Facts about marijuana", May 26, 2026. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/05/26/facts-about-marijuana/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[35] Foley and Lardner (law firm client alert), "DEA Issues Long-Awaited Final Order Rescheduling Certain Marijuana Products to Schedule III: What It Means, What It Doesn't, and What Comes Next", April 23, 2026. https://www.foley.com/insights/publications/2026/04/dea-issues-long-awaited-final-order-rescheduling-certain-marijuana-products-to-schedule-iii-what-it-means-what-it-doesnt-and-what-comes-next/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Morgan Lewis (law firm client alert), "High Time for a Change: Post-DEA Hearing, Broader Marijuana Rescheduling Questions Remain", September 24, 2026. https://www.morganlewis.com/de/pubs/2026/09/high-time-for-a-change-post-dea-hearing-broader-marijuana-rescheduling-questions-remain. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[36] Foley and Lardner (law firm client alert), "DEA Issues Long-Awaited Final Order Rescheduling Certain Marijuana Products to Schedule III: What It Means, What It Doesn't, and What Comes Next", April 23, 2026. https://www.foley.com/insights/publications/2026/04/dea-issues-long-awaited-final-order-rescheduling-certain-marijuana-products-to-schedule-iii-what-it-means-what-it-doesnt-and-what-comes-next/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[37] Foley and Lardner (law firm client alert), "DEA Issues Long-Awaited Final Order Rescheduling Certain Marijuana Products to Schedule III: What It Means, What It Doesn't, and What Comes Next", April 23, 2026. https://www.foley.com/insights/publications/2026/04/dea-issues-long-awaited-final-order-rescheduling-certain-marijuana-products-to-schedule-iii-what-it-means-what-it-doesnt-and-what-comes-next/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[38] Morgan Lewis (law firm client alert), "High Time for a Change: Post-DEA Hearing, Broader Marijuana Rescheduling Questions Remain", September 24, 2026. https://www.morganlewis.com/de/pubs/2026/09/high-time-for-a-change-post-dea-hearing-broader-marijuana-rescheduling-questions-remain. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[39] Morgan Lewis (law firm client alert), "High Time for a Change: Post-DEA Hearing, Broader Marijuana Rescheduling Questions Remain", September 24, 2026. https://www.morganlewis.com/de/pubs/2026/09/high-time-for-a-change-post-dea-hearing-broader-marijuana-rescheduling-questions-remain. Accessed November 18, 2026.

July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2020. Since July 1, 2020, the Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board has regulated both recreational and medical marijuana.[40]

According to NORML, an advocacy group that tracks state marijuana laws, the basic Nevada rules for adults 21 and older are:[41]

- Possession of up to one ounce of marijuana and up to 3.5 grams of concentrate.
- Using marijuana in public is a misdemeanor, with a fine of up to $600.
- Home growing of up to six plants (no more than 12 per household) is allowed only if you live 25 miles or more from a licensed store.
- Licensed consumption lounges are allowed under a state law known as AB 341.[42]

For driving, Nevada law sets limits of 2 nanograms of THC per milliliter of blood and 5 nanograms of a THC byproduct, but NORML reports that since July 1, 2021 those fixed limits apply only to felony cases.[43] Driving while impaired by marijuana is still illegal at any level. NORML's own pages contain some inconsistencies on these figures, so check the current Nevada Revised Statutes or a Nevada attorney before relying on them.

Chapter 12: Drug Crime in Federal Court

Most drug cases are handled in state courts, but federal numbers are the most complete. In fiscal year 2025, of 66,662 federal cases reported to the Sentencing Commission, 16,144 were for drug trafficking.[44]

[40] Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board, "Nevada Cannabis Program", page updated October 26, 2026. https://ccb.nv.gov/nevada-cannabis-program/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[41] NORML (marijuana law reform advocacy group), "Nevada Laws and Penalties", page updated September 25, 2024. https://norml.org/laws/nevada-penalties-2/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[42] Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board, "Nevada Cannabis Program", page updated October 26, 2026. https://ccb.nv.gov/nevada-cannabis-program/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[43] NORML (marijuana law reform advocacy group), "Nevada Drugged Driving", page updated June 4, 2021. https://norml.org/laws/drugged-driving/nevada-drugged-driving/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[44] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Fentanyl Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Fentanyl_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Drug Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Drug_Trafficking_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Drug in federal trafficking cases, FY2025	Share of cases	Average sentence
Methamphetamine	47%	105 months
Fentanyl and look-alikes	24%	81 months
Powder cocaine	19%	68 months
Crack cocaine	3%	70 months
Marijuana	2%	44 months

Drug in federal trafficking cases, FY2025	Share of cases	Average sentence
Heroin	2%	62 months

[45]

Since fiscal year 2021, federal fentanyl trafficking cases rose 135 percent, while heroin cases fell 80 percent, crack cases fell 57 percent and marijuana cases fell 62 percent. Of everyone sentenced for drug trafficking in fiscal year 2025, 81 percent were U.S. citizens and 97 percent went to prison. More than half, 56 percent, were convicted of an offense carrying a mandatory minimum sentence, though 44 percent of those were relieved of it, usually for helping prosecutors or having little criminal history.[46]

As of September 2025, the federal Bureau of Prisons held 154,932 people. The average sentence imposed on them was 153 months, and 85 percent were U.S. citizens.[47] **[Not verified]**: the share of federal prisoners serving time for drug offenses in 2025. The Sentencing Commission shows it only in a chart I could not read as text.

Chapter 13: Oregon's Experiment

In 2020 Oregon voters passed Measure 110, which decriminalized possession of small amounts of drugs and paid for treatment, harm reduction and peer support services. Overdose deaths kept rising, and in 2024 the legislature passed House Bill 4002, which made possession a misdemeanor again, punishable by up to 180 days in jail, starting September 1, 2024. The new law encourages police to send people to treatment programs, called deflection, instead of jail.[48]

Did Measure 110 cause the rise in deaths? Researchers at Portland State University studied that question for three years with funding from the National Institute of Justice. Their final report, released August 11, 2025, found "little evidence that Measure 110 was responsible for rising crime or overdose deaths." They pointed instead to the COVID-19 pandemic and the arrival of fentanyl, noting that drug deaths "began climbing rapidly before M110, peaked in 2023" and were starting to fall going into 2024.[49]

The same researchers warned against the opposite conclusion. "Our findings show that policy change alone isn't enough," one of them said, pointing to the need for treatment people can actually reach.[50] **[Not verified]**: results from Oregon's 2024 law. It is too new for a full study.

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[45] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Drug Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Drug_Trafficking_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[46] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Drug Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Drug_Trafficking_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[47] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Individuals in the Federal Bureau of Prisons (data as of September 2025)", page updated June 8, 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/research/quick-facts/individuals-federal-bureau-prisons. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[48] Portland State University, "With drug possession re-criminalization looming, PSU researchers study impacts of Measure 110", July 5, 2024. https://www.pdx.edu/news/drug-possession-re-criminalization-looming-psu-researchers-study-impacts-measure-110. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[49] Portland State University, "PSU Researchers Release Final Report in Landmark Project Exploring Impacts of Measure 110 Decriminalization", August 11, 2025. https://www.pdx.edu/research/news/psu-researchers-release-final-report-landmark-project-exploring-impacts-measure-110. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[50] Portland State University, "PSU Researchers Release Final Report in Landmark Project Exploring Impacts of Measure 110 Decriminalization", August 11, 2025. https://www.pdx.edu/research/news/psu-researchers-release-final-report-landmark-project-exploring-impacts-measure-110. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Four: Treatment That Works

Chapter 14: The Medicines

For opioid addiction, the strongest evidence is for three medicines: methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone.[51]

- **Methadone** and **buprenorphine** are "opioid agonist" medicines, meaning they are opioids themselves, used under a doctor's care.
- **Naltrexone** is an "opioid antagonist": it blocks the effects of opioids.[52]

The evidence that they save lives is strong. A National Institutes of Health study of 17,568 adults in Massachusetts who survived an opioid overdose found that over the next 12 months, overdose deaths were **59 percent lower** for those who received methadone and **38 percent lower** for those who received buprenorphine, compared with those who got no medicine. A Maryland study of 48,274 adults in outpatient treatment found the risk of overdose death was **about five times lower** while people were on methadone or buprenorphine than in treatment without medicine, and that the longer people stayed in treatment, the lower their risk after they left.[53]

Yet the same Massachusetts study found that in the year after an overdose, less than a third of survivors got any of these medicines: 11 percent methadone, 17 percent buprenorphine and 6 percent naltrexone. Worse, 34 percent were prescribed opioid painkillers and 26 percent were prescribed benzodiazepines, a class of anxiety drugs that is dangerous to combine with opioids.[54] NIDA notes that most people who seek help for opioid addiction get only counseling, drug testing, peer support or education.[55]

Some people object that medicines like methadone "trade one drug for another." The research question is not whether the medicine is an opioid; it is whether people on it live longer and do better. On that question the evidence above is clear. What the right treatment is for any one person is a decision for that person and a doctor.

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[51] National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Medication Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder Can Protect Against Overdose Death (NIDA Notes, archived)", May 2021. https://drugabuse.gov/news-events/nida-notes/2021/05/medication-treatment-opioid-use-disorder-can-protect-against-overdose-death. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[52] National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Medication Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder Can Protect Against Overdose Death (NIDA Notes, archived)", May 2021. https://drugabuse.gov/news-events/nida-notes/2021/05/medication-treatment-opioid-use-disorder-can-protect-against-overdose-death. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[53] National Institutes of Health, "Methadone and buprenorphine reduce risk of death after opioid overdose (news release on Larochelle et al., Annals of Internal Medicine)", June 19, 2018. https://nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/methadone-buprenorphine-reduce-risk-death-after-opioid-overdose. Accessed November 18, 2026. National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Medication Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder Can Protect Against Overdose Death (NIDA Notes, archived)", May 2021. https://drugabuse.gov/news-events/nida-notes/2021/05/medication-treatment-opioid-use-disorder-can-protect-against-overdose-death. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[54] National Institutes of Health, "Methadone and buprenorphine reduce risk of death after opioid overdose (news release on Larochelle et al., Annals of Internal Medicine)", June 19, 2018. https://nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/methadone-buprenorphine-reduce-risk-death-after-opioid-overdose. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[55] National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Medication Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder Can Protect Against Overdose Death (NIDA Notes, archived)", May 2021. https://drugabuse.gov/news-events/nida-notes/2021/05/medication-treatment-opioid-use-disorder-can-protect-against-overdose-death. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Chapter 15: Naloxone

Naloxone, sold under the brand name Narcan and others, reverses an opioid overdose. On March 29, 2023, the Food and Drug Administration approved Narcan, a 4-milligram naloxone nasal spray, for sale without a prescription, the first naloxone product approved for use without one. You can buy it at a pharmacy or store like any other over-the-counter medicine.[56]

If you think someone is overdosing, call 911 first, then follow the directions on the naloxone package and stay with the person until help arrives. The package and the 911 dispatcher will tell you what to do next. **[Not verified]**: the official repeat-dose instructions; read them on the package you buy.

Chapter 16: The Treatment Gap

Each year the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks Americans aged 12 and older about drug and alcohol use; the 2025 survey completed 60,447 interviews.[57] Released by SAMHSA in July 2026, it found 47.5 million people had used an illicit drug in the past month, and 129.1 million had drunk alcohol.[58]

Here is how the survey's key treatment findings were summarized by the Addiction Policy Forum, a nonprofit group that works on addiction policy:[59]

2025 NSDUH finding, ages 12 and older	Number
Had a substance use disorder in the past year	44.6 million (15.3 percent), down from 16.8 percent in 2024
Alcohol use disorder	25.7 million
Drug use disorder	26 million
Opioid use disorder	4.0 million
Needed substance use treatment	47.2 million
Received any substance use treatment	7.6 million, about 1 in 6
Adults who consider themselves in recovery or recovered	22.3 million

[56] Indian Health Service, National Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee, "Med Update: FDA Approves First Over-the-Counter Naloxone Nasal Spray", March 29, 2023. https://www.ihs.gov/sites/nptc/themes/responsive2017/display_objects/documents/guidance/NPTC-Med-Update-FDA-Approves-First-OTC-Naloxone-Nasal-Spray.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[57] Kastalia Medrano, Filter, "SAMHSA Reframes National Drug Use Survey, Leaves Fentanyl Problem Intact", August 4, 2026. https://filtermag.org/samhsa-2025-national-drug-use-health-survey-fentanyl/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[58] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2025 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (PEP26-07-010)", 2026. https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt57150/2025-nsduh-annual-national-html/2025-nsduh-annual-national.htm. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[59] Addiction Policy Forum (addiction policy nonprofit), "2025 National Survey Shows Declines in Substance Use Disorders While Significant Treatment Gaps Remain", July 28, 2026. https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/2025-national-survey-shows-declines-in-substance-use-disorders-while-significant-treatment-gaps-rem. Accessed November 18, 2026.

The treatment gap is the heart of the problem. Of the 4 million people with an opioid use disorder, the summary reports that only 15.7 percent received medicine for it. (The same summary lists a different, larger count elsewhere, so treat the exact figure with care.) Among adults with a substance use disorder who did not get treatment, the most common reason given was that they believed they could handle it on their own.[61]

There is good news in the numbers too. Twenty-two million adults say they are in recovery or have recovered.[62] I am one of them. Recovery is not rare. It is common, and it is possible.

One caution about the survey: a news analysis noted that the survey's disorder measures do not count disorders that come only from illegally made fentanyl, and that about 768,000 people reported using illegal fentanyl in 2025.[63] **[Not verified]**: how much this rule undercounts addiction.

Chapter 17: Where to Find Help

Each of these numbers was checked on the official site on November 18, 2026.

Need	Where to go
Treatment referral and information, for you or a family member	SAMHSA National Helpline, 1-800-662-4357 (1-800-662-HELP). Free, confidential, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English and Spanish.[64]
Find a licensed treatment program near you	FindTreatment.gov, a confidential and anonymous federal locator for state-licensed addiction and mental health treatment.[65]
A crisis, thoughts of suicide, or emotional distress	988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org. Free, confidential, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.[66]
A possible poisoning or a question about a drug or chemical	Poison Help, 1-800-222-1222. Connects you to your local poison center, 24 hours a day, in more than 100 languages.[67]

[60] Addiction Policy Forum (addiction policy nonprofit), "2025 National Survey Shows Declines in Substance Use Disorders While Significant Treatment Gaps Remain", July 28, 2026. https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/2025-national-survey-shows-declines-in-substance-use-disorders-while-significant-treatment-gaps-rem. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[61] Addiction Policy Forum (addiction policy nonprofit), "2025 National Survey Shows Declines in Substance Use Disorders While Significant Treatment Gaps Remain", July 28, 2026. https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/2025-national-survey-shows-declines-in-substance-use-disorders-while-significant-treatment-gaps-rem. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[62] Addiction Policy Forum (addiction policy nonprofit), "2025 National Survey Shows Declines in Substance Use Disorders While Significant Treatment Gaps Remain", July 28, 2026. https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/2025-national-survey-shows-declines-in-substance-use-disorders-while-significant-treatment-gaps-rem. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[63] Kastalia Medrano, Filter, "SAMHSA Reframes National Drug Use Survey, Leaves Fentanyl Problem Intact", August 4, 2026. https://filtermag.org/samhsa-2025-national-drug-use-health-survey-fentanyl/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[64] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "SAMHSA National Helpline", page updated March 25, 2026. https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/helplines/national-helpline. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[65] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "FindTreatment.gov", undated. https://findtreatment.gov/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[66] 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, "988 Lifeline home page", undated. https://988lifeline.org/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Need	Where to go
Someone is not breathing, will not wake up, or has blue lips	Call 911.

If you are a family member, you don't have to wait for your loved one to be "ready" to get help for yourself. My book New Beginnings for Families is written for you.

[67] Health Resources and Services Administration, "Poison Help", page updated December 11, 2024. https://poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Five: Claims Checked

Each claim below is one you are likely to hear from a politician, a news report, a neighbor or a relative. For each one I give the verdict first, then the evidence. The verdicts are explained in the Introduction.

Claim 1: "Overdose deaths are finally going down."

Verdict: True.

Estimated overdose deaths fell from nearly 110,000 in 2022 to 81,313 in 2024 and 69,973 in 2025, the third yearly decline in a row. Almost every state saw a decrease in 2025.[68] The 2025 figure is still provisional and still means about 190 deaths a day, but the direction is clear.

Claim 2: "Fentanyl is being smuggled in by illegal immigrants."

Verdict: False, as a general statement.

Of the 3,605 people sentenced in federal court for fentanyl trafficking in fiscal year 2025, 84 percent were U.S. citizens.[69] In fiscal year 2023 the figure was 86.4 percent.[70] Court records count only those caught and convicted, so they can't rule out that some smugglers who are never caught are in the country illegally. But the people the federal government actually convicts of trafficking fentanyl are overwhelmingly American citizens.

Claim 3: "China is making the fentanyl that is killing Americans."

Verdict: Partly true.

China is a primary source of the chemicals used to make fentanyl, along with India. But the fentanyl itself is now made chiefly in Mexico, and almost none has been detected coming directly from China since China's 2019 controls. China has added export controls on precursors since 2025.[71]

Claim 4: "You can overdose just by touching fentanyl."

Verdict: False.

The American College of Medical Toxicology and the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology have said that "incidental dermal absorption is unlikely to cause opioid toxicity," and that nitrile gloves give

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[68] Mike Stobbe, Associated Press (published by Fortune), "Overdose deaths in U.S. have been dropping for over 2 years, the longest decline in decades", January 15, 2026. https://fortune.com/2026/01/15/overdose-deaths-in-u-s-have-been-dropping-for-over-2-years-the-longest-decline-in-decades/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[69] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Fentanyl Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Fentanyl_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[70] KFF, "Most Sentenced for Trafficking Fentanyl are U.S. Citizens", September 20, 2024. https://www.kff.org/quick-insights/most-sentenced-for-trafficking-fentanyl-are-u-s-citizens/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[71] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

enough protection for routine handling. An analysis cited by Maryland's overdose response office found it would take 14 minutes of constant contact with prescription fentanyl patches, which are designed to deliver the drug through the skin, to absorb a dose about equal to 10 milligrams of morphine, and about 200 minutes of breathing air at industrial levels. The same office notes that no toxicology test has confirmed fentanyl exposure in the widely reported cases of first responders falling ill after touching it.[72] Washing skin with soap and water is the right step after contact; alcohol-based sanitizer is not, because it may increase absorption.[73]

Claim 5: "Addiction medicine just trades one drug for another."

Verdict: False, as a judgment of whether it works.

Methadone and buprenorphine are opioids, so the literal part of the claim is accurate. But the claim is usually made to suggest the medicines don't help. The evidence says they do: overdose deaths were 59 percent lower with methadone and 38 percent lower with buprenorphine among overdose survivors in Massachusetts, and the risk of overdose death was about five times lower for people in medicine-based treatment in Maryland.[74]

Claim 6: "Most people who survive an overdose get treatment."

Verdict: False.

In the Massachusetts study, less than a third of overdose survivors got any addiction medicine in the following year.[75]

Claim 7: "Oregon's drug decriminalization caused a spike in overdose deaths."

Verdict: Inconclusive, leaning against.

Deaths did rise in Oregon after Measure 110. But a three-year Portland State University study funded by the National Institute of Justice found "little evidence that Measure 110 was responsible for rising crime or overdose deaths," tying the rise to the pandemic and the arrival of fentanyl, and noting that deaths

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[72] Maryland Office of Overdose Response, "Fact Check: Accidental Fentanyl Exposure (update)", about May 2024. https://stopoverdose.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2024/05/Fact-Check_-Accidental-Fentanyl-Exposure-update.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. Kayla Clarke, WDIV ClickOnDetroit, "Health experts: No, you can't overdose just by touching fentanyl", September 23, 2024. https://www.clickondetroit.com/health/2024/09/23/health-experts-no-you-cant-overdose-just-by-touching-fentanyl. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[73] Kayla Clarke, WDIV ClickOnDetroit, "Health experts: No, you can't overdose just by touching fentanyl", September 23, 2024. https://www.clickondetroit.com/health/2024/09/23/health-experts-no-you-cant-overdose-just-by-touching-fentanyl. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[74] National Institutes of Health, "Methadone and buprenorphine reduce risk of death after opioid overdose (news release on Larochelle et al., Annals of Internal Medicine)", June 19, 2018. https://nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/methadone-buprenorphine-reduce-risk-death-after-opioid-overdose. Accessed November 18, 2026. National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Medication Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder Can Protect Against Overdose Death (NIDA Notes, archived)", May 2021. https://drugabuse.gov/news-events/nida-notes/2021/05/medication-treatment-opioid-use-disorder-can-protect-against-overdose-death. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[75] National Institutes of Health, "Methadone and buprenorphine reduce risk of death after opioid overdose (news release on Larochelle et al., Annals of Internal Medicine)", June 19, 2018. https://nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/methadone-buprenorphine-reduce-risk-death-after-opioid-overdose. Accessed November 18, 2026.

were climbing before the measure took effect.[76] One study does not settle the question, and others may weigh the evidence differently, but the best study I found does not support the claim.

Claim 8: "Marijuana is now legal under federal law."

Verdict: False.

The 2026 federal order moved only FDA-approved marijuana products and state-licensed medical marijuana to Schedule III. Recreational marijuana, even when sold legally under state law, stayed in Schedule I. Even Schedule III drugs are federally controlled substances.[77]

Claim 9: "Most Americans live where recreational marijuana is legal."

Verdict: True.

As of May 2026, 53 percent of Americans lived in a place where recreational marijuana was legal: 24 states and the District of Columbia.[78]

Claim 10: "Teen drug use is out of control."

Verdict: False.

The 2025 Monitoring the Future survey found teen use of most drugs held steady, and most teens used no marijuana, alcohol or nicotine in the past month. Heroin and cocaine use rose by small but significant amounts, which researchers said warrants close watching. Levels remain far below what they were decades ago.[79]

Claim 11: "Federal prisons are full of people serving time for marijuana."

Verdict: False.

Marijuana made up 2 percent of federal drug trafficking cases in fiscal year 2025, and marijuana trafficking cases fell 62 percent from fiscal year 2021. Methamphetamine (47 percent) and fentanyl (24

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[76] Portland State University, "PSU Researchers Release Final Report in Landmark Project Exploring Impacts of Measure 110 Decriminalization", August 11, 2025. https://www.pdx.edu/research/news/psu-researchers-release-final-report-landmark-project-exploring-impacts-measure-110. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[77] Foley and Lardner (law firm client alert), "DEA Issues Long-Awaited Final Order Rescheduling Certain Marijuana Products to Schedule III: What It Means, What It Doesn't, and What Comes Next", April 23, 2026. https://www.foley.com/insights/publications/2026/04/dea-issues-long-awaited-final-order-rescheduling-certain-marijuana-products-to-schedule-iii-what-it-means-what-it-doesnt-and-what-comes-next/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Morgan Lewis (law firm client alert), "High Time for a Change: Post-DEA Hearing, Broader Marijuana Rescheduling Questions Remain", September 24, 2026. https://www.morganlewis.com/de/pubs/2026/09/high-time-for-a-change-post-dea-hearing-broader-marijuana-rescheduling-questions-remain. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[78] Pew Research Center, "Facts about marijuana", May 26, 2026. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/05/26/facts-about-marijuana/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[79] National Institutes of Health, "Reported use of most drugs remains low among U.S. teens (Monitoring the Future 2025, news release)", December 17, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/reported-use-most-drugs-remains-low-among-us-teens. Accessed November 18, 2026.

percent) made up most of the cases.[80] **[Not verified]**: the exact number of people in federal prison today for marijuana alone; the Sentencing Commission reports it only in a chart.

Claim 12: "Overdose deaths are falling because of the crackdown on the border and on China."

Verdict: Inconclusive.

Deaths began falling in 2023, before most of the 2025 border, tariff and China actions, and they kept falling through 2025.[81] Pressure on supply may play a part, as it did in 2018.[82] So may naloxone, treatment and changes in the drug supply. No study I found measures how much each factor contributed.

[80] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Drug Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Drug_Trafficking_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[81] Mike Stobbe, Associated Press (published by Fortune), "Overdose deaths in U.S. have been dropping for over 2 years, the longest decline in decades", January 15, 2026. https://fortune.com/2026/01/15/overdose-deaths-in-u-s-have-been-dropping-for-over-2-years-the-longest-decline-in-decades/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026. Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[82] Mike Stobbe, Associated Press (published by Fortune), "Overdose deaths in U.S. have been dropping for over 2 years, the longest decline in decades", January 15, 2026. https://fortune.com/2026/01/15/overdose-deaths-in-u-s-have-been-dropping-for-over-2-years-the-longest-decline-in-decades/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Six: Where Things Stand

Chapter 18: November 18, 2026

- **Overdose deaths:** falling for the third straight year, to an estimated 69,973 in 2025.[83]
- **Fentanyl supply:** made chiefly in Mexico from precursors that come mainly from China and India; China has added export controls since 2025.[84]
- **Federal fentanyl cases:** 3,605 sentenced in fiscal year 2025, 84 percent U.S. citizens, average sentence 79 months.[85]
- **Marijuana:** recreational in 24 states and D.C.; medical marijuana under state licenses moved to federal Schedule III in April 2026; a decision on the rest is pending.[86]
- **Oregon:** drug possession a crime again since September 1, 2024.[87]

Chapter 19: What Nobody Knows Yet

- **Why deaths are falling,** in what proportions, and whether the decline will last. New substances keep entering the supply.[88]
- **Whether all marijuana will move to Schedule III.** As of the last report I could confirm, the DEA judge's recommendation was still pending.[89]
- **How Oregon's 2024 law is working.** It is too new for a full study.
- **The 2026 overdose total.** It will not be estimated until 2027.

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[83] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[84] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[85] U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Fentanyl Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Fentanyl_FY25.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[86] Pew Research Center, "Facts about marijuana", May 26, 2026. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/05/26/facts-about-marijuana/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Foley and Lardner (law firm client alert), "DEA Issues Long-Awaited Final Order Rescheduling Certain Marijuana Products to Schedule III: What It Means, What It Doesn't, and What Comes Next", April 23, 2026. https://www.foley.com/insights/publications/2026/04/dea-issues-long-awaited-final-order-rescheduling-certain-marijuana-products-to-schedule-iii-what-it-means-what-it-doesnt-and-what-comes-next/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Morgan Lewis (law firm client alert), "High Time for a Change: Post-DEA Hearing, Broader Marijuana Rescheduling Questions Remain", September 24, 2026. https://www.morganlewis.com/de/pubs/2026/09/high-time-for-a-change-post-dea-hearing-broader-marijuana-rescheduling-questions-remain. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[87] Portland State University, "With drug possession re-criminalization looming, PSU researchers study impacts of Measure 110", July 5, 2024. https://www.pdx.edu/news/drug-possession-re-criminalization-looming-psu-researchers-study-impacts-measure-110. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[88] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

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Chapter 20: What Families Can Do

These steps are not medical or legal advice, but each one follows from the records in this book.

1. **Keep naloxone in the house** if anyone in your home uses opioids, takes prescription opioids, or might come in contact with street drugs. It has been sold without a prescription since 2023. Learn how to use it.[90]
2. **Know that fake pills are common.** A pill bought from anyone other than a pharmacy may contain fentanyl, no matter what it looks like (Chapter 2).[91]
3. **Ask about medicine.** If someone you love has an opioid addiction, ask their doctor or treatment program about methadone, buprenorphine or naltrexone. Medicine-based treatment is linked to far fewer deaths, and most overdose survivors never get it (Chapter 14).[92]
4. **Stay in treatment.** The longer people stayed in medicine-based treatment, the lower their risk after leaving.[93]
5. **Talk to your kids.** Most teens don't use drugs, and saying so helps (Chapter 3).[94]
6. **Know Nevada's rules** if you live here or visit: 21 and older, limits on how much you can carry, no public use, and no driving impaired (Chapter 11).[95]
7. **Use the help lines** in Chapter 17. You don't have to figure this out alone. I didn't.

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[90] Indian Health Service, National Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee, "Med Update: FDA Approves First Over-the-Counter Naloxone Nasal Spray", March 29, 2023. https://www.ihs.gov/sites/nptc/themes/responsive2017/display_objects/documents/guidance/NPTC-Med-Update-FDA-Approves-First-OTC-Naloxone-Nasal-Spray.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[91] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

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[95] NORML (marijuana law reform advocacy group), "Nevada Laws and Penalties", page updated September 25, 2024. https://norml.org/laws/nevada-penalties-2/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board, "Nevada Cannabis Program", page updated October 26, 2026. https://ccb.nv.gov/nevada-cannabis-program/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Appendix A: Timeline

Date	Event
November 8, 2016	Nevada voters approve recreational marijuana (Question 2); legal January 1, 2017.[96]
2018	NIH study finds methadone and buprenorphine cut overdose deaths among survivors by 59 and 38 percent.[97]
2019	China puts the whole class of fentanyl-type drugs under control.[98]
July 1, 2020	Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board takes over marijuana regulation.[99]
2020	Oregon voters pass Measure 110.[100]
2022	Overdose deaths peak at nearly 110,000.[101]
2024	Overdose deaths fall about 27 percent, the largest drop on record.[102]
September 1, 2024	Oregon makes drug possession a misdemeanor again (House Bill 4002).[103]
June 2025	China completes control of all internationally

[96] Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board, "Nevada Cannabis Program", page updated October 26, 2026. https://ccb.nv.gov/nevada-cannabis-program/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[97] National Institutes of Health, "Methadone and buprenorphine reduce risk of death after opioid overdose (news release on Larochelle et al., Annals of Internal Medicine)", June 19, 2018. https://nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/methadone-buprenorphine-reduce-risk-death-after-opioid-overdose. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[98] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[99] Nevada Cannabis Compliance Board, "Nevada Cannabis Program", page updated October 26, 2026. https://ccb.nv.gov/nevada-cannabis-program/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[100] Portland State University, "With drug possession re-criminalization looming, PSU researchers study impacts of Measure 110", July 5, 2024. https://www.pdx.edu/news/drug-possession-re-criminalization-looming-psu-researchers-study-impacts-measure-110. Accessed November 18, 2026.

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Date	Event
	listed fentanyl precursors.[104]
August 11, 2025	Portland State final report on Measure 110.[105]
November 2025	China puts export controls on 13 fentanyl precursors to North America.[106]
November 18, 2025	New York Attorney General announces court approval of Purdue Pharma's $7.4 billion plan.[107]
December 2025	Executive order designates illegal fentanyl a weapon of mass destruction; executive order on marijuana rescheduling.[108]
December 17, 2025	Monitoring the Future: teen drug use mostly steady.[109]
April 23, 2026	Federal order moves FDA-approved and state-licensed medical marijuana to Schedule III.[110]
May 13, 2026	CDC estimates 69,973 overdose deaths in 2025, down almost 14 percent.[111]
June 29 to July 15, 2026	DEA hearing on moving all marijuana to Schedule III.[112]

[104] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[105] Portland State University, "PSU Researchers Release Final Report in Landmark Project Exploring Impacts of Measure 110 Decriminalization", August 11, 2025. https://www.pdx.edu/research/news/psu-researchers-release-final-report-landmark-project-exploring-impacts-measure-110. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[106] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

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[111] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease for Third Consecutive Year in 2025 (press release)", May 13, 2026. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/releases/20260513.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Date	Event
October 7, 2026	CRS updates its report on China and fentanyl.[113]

Appendix B: Glossary

Controlled Substances Act: the 1970 federal law that sorts drugs into five schedules.

Decriminalization: removing criminal penalties for an act, such as possessing a small amount of a drug, without making it fully legal.

Deflection: sending a person to treatment instead of arresting or charging them.

Fentanyl: a powerful synthetic opioid. It has medical uses, but most fentanyl deaths involve illegally made fentanyl.

Mandatory minimum: a minimum prison sentence set by law for certain crimes.

Naloxone: a medicine that reverses an opioid overdose. Narcan is one brand.

Nitazenes: a family of powerful synthetic opioids that has appeared in the illegal drug supply.

Opioid: a drug that acts like morphine, including heroin, fentanyl and prescription painkillers.

Precursor: a chemical used to make a drug.

Provisional: a preliminary count that may change as death investigations finish.

Schedule I through V: the five federal categories of controlled substances (Chapter 8).

Substance use disorder: the medical term for addiction.

[112] Morgan Lewis (law firm client alert), "High Time for a Change: Post-DEA Hearing, Broader Marijuana Rescheduling Questions Remain", September 24, 2026. https://www.morganlewis.com/de/pubs/2026/09/high-time-for-a-change-post-dea-hearing-broader-marijuana-rescheduling-questions-remain. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[113] Congressional Research Service, "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role (IF10890)", updated October 7, 2026. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-10-07_IF10890_a90986132d374b6ff4ae21e90db1000cb3cfc131.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Appendix C: Full Source List

Every source cited in this book is listed here once, grouped by the five tiers explained in the Introduction. Sources were read on November 18, 2026.

Tier 1: Primary and official sources

- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, "988 Lifeline home page", undated. https://988lifeline.org/.
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- National Institutes of Health, "Reported use of most drugs remains low among U.S. teens (Monitoring the Future 2025, news release)", December 17, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/reported-use-most-drugs-remains-low-among-us-teens.
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- U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Quick Facts: Fentanyl Trafficking Offenses, Fiscal Year 2025", 2026. https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Fentanyl_FY25.pdf.
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