

## American Opioid Moral Panic

A moral panic is a widespread fear, most often an irrational one, that someone or something is a threat to the values, safety, and interests of a community or society at large.

Typically, perpetuated by the news media, fueled by politicians, and often results in the passage of new laws or policies that target the source of the panic.

In this way, it can foster increased social control.



Stanley Cohen



## Five Stages of Developing a Moral Panic

**First**, something or someone is perceived and defined as a threat to social norms and the interests of the community or society at large.

**Third**, widespread public concern is aroused by the way news media portrays the symbolic representation of the threat.

**In the final stage**, the moral panic and the subsequent actions of those in power lead to social change in the community.



**Second**, the news media and community members depict the threat in simplistic, symbolic ways that quickly become recognizable to the greater public.

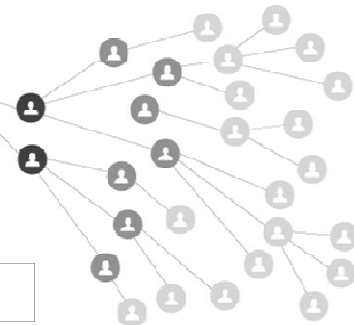
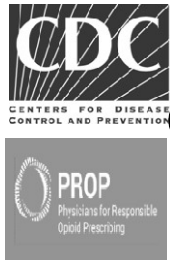
**Fourth**, the authorities and policymakers respond to the threat, be it real or perceived, with new laws or policies.

Sources of Disinformation

Mavens Primary

Mavens Secondary

Recipients of Misinformation



## Key Players in a Moral Panic



"Folk devils," and the enforcers of rules or laws, like institutional authority figures, police, or armed forces.



News media plays its role by breaking the news about the threat and continuing to report on it, thereby setting the agenda for how it is discussed and attaching visual symbolic images to it.



Politicians, who respond to the threat and sometimes fan the flames of the panic, and the public, which develops a focused concern about the threat and demands action in response to it.

## Beneficiaries of Social Outrage

- **Those in Power since it leads to increased control of the population**
  - Reinforcement of the authority of those in charge
  - Gives a cause to enact legislation/laws that would not be a concern if not for the perceived threat of the moral panic
- **News Media via a symbiotic relationship with the state**
  - Reporting on threats that become moral panics increases viewership and makes money for the news organization
  - Reporters get accolades for breaking news stories



## Example of Moral Panic

The Salem witch trials, which took place throughout colonial Massachusetts in 1692.

Women who were social outcasts faced accusations of witchcraft after local girls were afflicted with unexplained fits.

This served to reinforce and strengthen the social authority of local religious leaders since witchcraft was perceived to be a threat to Christian values, laws and order



## War on Drugs: Outcome of Moral Panic

During a 1994 interview, President Nixon's domestic policy chief, John Ehrlichman, provided inside information suggesting that the War on Drugs campaign had ulterior motives, which mainly involved helping Nixon keep his job.

In the interview, conducted by journalist Dan Baum and published in *Harper* magazine, Ehrlichman explained that the Nixon campaign had two enemies: "the antiwar left and black people." His comments led many to question Nixon's intentions in advocating for drug reform and whether racism played a role.

Ehrlichman was quoted as saying: "We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities.

We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did."

<https://time.com/5638316/war-on-drugs-opium-history/>



## President Nixon Played the Fear Card

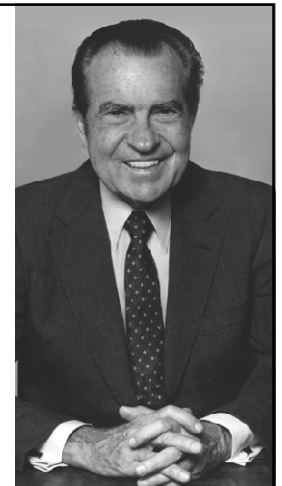
In June 1971, Nixon officially declared a "War on Drugs," stating that drug abuse was "public enemy number one"

President Richard M. Nixon signed the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) into law in 1970. This statute calls for the regulation of certain drugs and substances. The CSA outlines five "schedules" used to classify drugs based on their medical application and potential for abuse.

Schedule 1 drugs are considered the most dangerous, as they pose a very high risk for addiction with little evidence of medical benefits. Marijuana, LSD, heroin, MDMA (ecstasy) and other drugs are included on the list of Schedule 1 drugs.

Nixon's dehumanization and demonization of drug offenders had been a smashing success.

DEA created.



## “Just Say No”

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan reinforced and expanded many of Nixon’s War on Drugs policies. In 1984, his wife Nancy Reagan launched the “Just Say No” campaign, which was intended to highlight the dangers of drug use.

President Reagan’s refocus on drugs and the passing of severe penalties for drug-related crimes in Congress and state legislatures led to a massive increase in incarcerations for nonviolent drug crimes.



## The Washington Post

*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

**More than 100 billion pain pills saturated the nation over nine years:**

By Steven Rich, Scott Higham and Sara Horwitz



## Detoxification as Performance Art

1st June, 2019 | By Lynn Webster, M.D.



<https://youtu.be/8IR12fx7CKA>

<https://www.lynnwebstermd.com/2019/06/01/detoxification/>

## Hollywood Romanticizes Addiction

20th January, 2019 | By Lynn Webster, M.D.



<https://www.lynnwebstermd.com/2019/01/20/hollywood-romanticizes-addiction/>

### Man Trapped in a Billboard

13th July, 2019 | By Lynn Webster, M.D.



<https://youtu.be/96rC6GMbM6s>



### 2016 Super Bowl ad, “Envy.”

“Next year, how about fewer ads that fuel opioid addiction and more on access to treatment,” White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough complained on [Twitter](#).


“Was that really an ad for junkies who can’t [poop]? America, I luv ya but I just can’t keep up,” TV host Bill Maher [tweeted](#).

Neurology > General Neurology

### CDC Comes Down Hard on Opioids

— Urges physicians not to use opioids first-line for chronic pain

by Kristina Fiore, Associate Editor, MedPage Today    December 27, 2016



“Put simply, the risks of opioids are overdose and death, and the benefits are transient and generally unproven,” Tom Frieden, MD, MPH, director of the CDC, said during a press briefing. “The epidemic of opioid overdose deaths is doctor-driven, and it can be reversed in part by doctors’ actions.”

## What Drives Demand

Untreated mood disorders


Psychoactive Seekers

Mental Health


Mental Health

Tang, Salkovskis et al., 2009; BJCP, 48; 1-20      Webster LR. *Anesth Analg*. 2017 Nov;125(5):1741-174

“Princeton professors, **Anne Case** and **Angus Deaton** “cumulative health and personal problems often lead to addictions, overdoses, and suicides that they call *"deaths of despair."*”



Anne Case



Angus Deaton

[https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/6\\_casedeaton.pdf?\\_sm\\_by=IVZ47sv0Vik6n2R](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/6_casedeaton.pdf?_sm_by=IVZ47sv0Vik6n2R)

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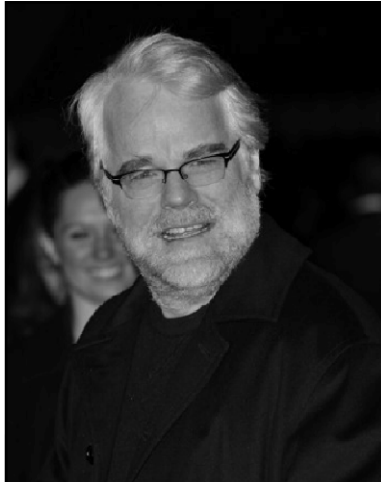
Home » American Journal of Public Health (AJPH) » February 2018

## Opioid Crisis: No Easy Fix to Its Social and Economic Determinants


Nabaran Dasgupta PhD, MPH, Leo Beletsky JD, MPH, and Daniel Ciccarone MD, MPH

[+] Author affiliations, information, and correspondence details

Accepted: October 14, 2017    Published Online: January 10, 2018



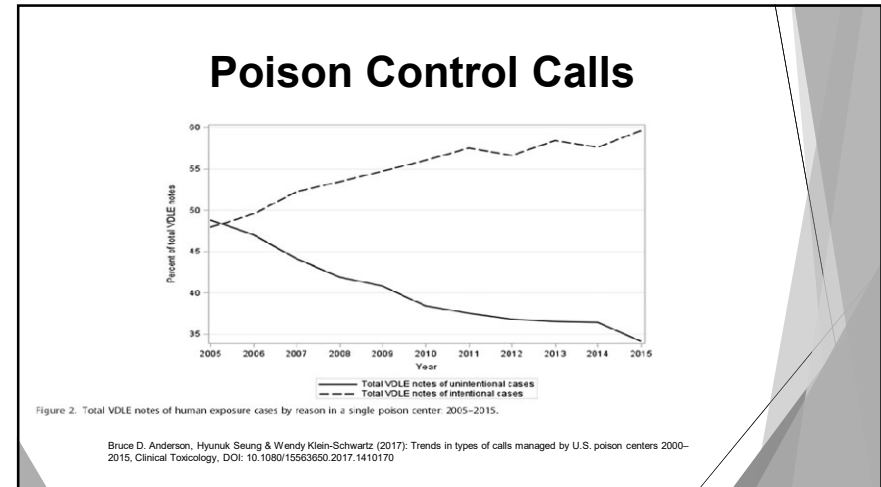
# Why? WHY?


**The NEW ENGLAND  
JOURNAL of MEDICINE**

**Perspective**  
**Suicide: A Silent Contributor to Opioid-Overdose Deaths**

Maria A. Oquendo, M.D., Ph.D., and Nora D. Volkow, M.D.

N Engl J Med 2018; 378:1567-1569 DOI: 10.1056/NEJMp1801417



## What “Rocketman” Tells Us About Pain and Addiction

15th June, 2019 | By Lynn Webster, M.D.



<https://www.lynnwebstermd.com/2019/06/15/rocketman/>

## Trying to Get to a Rational Opioid Policy

- Most policy on the state and federal level attempts to limit the number, length and extent of opioid exposures.
- What is the optimal level of opioid prescriptions or exposure in the absence of non-opioid modalities of treatment that is effective for long-term, around-the-clock pain that has not been adequately managed with other therapies?
- While a correction was necessary, equal attention should be paid to the need to make the exposures that do occur as safe as they can possibly be.

## Opioid Prescribing and the Healthcare System

- **What has increased opioid prescribing exposed in our healthcare system?**
- **Where does our healthcare system fail?**
  - Chronicity
  - Conditions with major motivational/psychiatric component
  - CARE COORDINATION: Communication among professionals
  - Ongoing risk assessment
  - Conditions that intersect badly with socioeconomic status
  - Stigmatization



## Thank you!

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[www.LynnWebsterMD.com](http://www.LynnWebsterMD.com)

## Self-Assessment Question 1



**2020 Prescription Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths:**

- A. Exceed number of fentanyl-related deaths
- B. Are responsible for most drug-related deaths in Montana
- C. Are primarily due to economic and social determinants
- D. Occur predominantly in people prescribed opioids for pain

## Self-Assessment Question 2



**Morphine Milligram Equivalents :**

- A. Is based upon well characterized research
- B. Is used to determine maximum effective dose
- C. Is related to risk of addiction
- D. Is used to estimate the dose comparisons of different opioid molecules