

## Nebraska's deaths from meth use higher than from opioids

Local, state and federal officials want to send the message that while fentanyl and opioids often dominate the headlines, meth poses a major threat in Nebraska. The officials came together this week in Kearney to share ideas for a task force to battle methamphetamine use.

*"A leading goal of this partnership is to sound the alarm that meth use continues to spread across our state."* Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson said Wednesday during a press conference.

*"We want citizens to be fully informed about the dangers of meth consumption and understand the destruction it brings to communities."*

Nebraska is one of the few states where deaths from methamphetamine use are higher than from opioids, according to FBI special agent Eugene Kowel. The task force will allow local and federal officials to combine forces *"because meth is especially destructive"* in big cities and small towns alike.

The amount of methamphetamine seized in Nebraska has surged 293% in the past five years, with law enforcement agencies combining to bring in approximately 768 pounds in 2021, Peterson said. Nationwide, methamphetamine seizures increased 77% from 2018-2019, according to the most recent data available.

*"While fentanyl and opioids dominate the headlines, it's important that we don't lose sight of the threat of methamphetamine."* Justin C. King of the Drug Enforcement Administration office in Omaha said. *"This highly addictive substance is destroying families in Nebraska and crossing our state borders in alarming amounts. We want people to be aware that methamphetamine is a dangerous drug with life-altering consequences."*

Meth was once primarily distributed by biker gangs or made in small local labs, said Jan Sharp, the interim U.S. Attorney for Nebraska. Now large amounts of meth come to Nebraska from Mexico, purer and cheaper than before. Sharp said his office prosecutes from 500-600 cases every year and 40% of those cases involve drugs. Methamphetamine arrests make up 75% of those drug cases, he said.

*"Our prosecutions of meth dealers continue to rise,"* Sharp said. *"The methamphetamine that arrives in Nebraska is distributed and sold by gangs that routinely use guns and violence to conduct their illegal activities. We are attacking this program in a concerted approach with local, state and federal agencies."* It's a three-pronged attack, Peterson said,

of prevention, treatment and law enforcement. The task forces will hold press conferences around Nebraska to spread the message among grade school and junior high students of meth's destructive effects.

Treatment of meth addicts will be bolstered by a federal commitment of \$100 million over the next 18 years to provide more extensive rehabilitation programs, Peterson said. The law enforcement component will be clearly aimed at identifying and arresting members of the drug cartels pushing meth into the state, he said.

"What the cartels are doing is flooding the market (with meth) to keep people using," the DEA's King said. "New high production in Mexico is selling meth 69% cheaper than in 2005. Kowel said the federal involvement means state and local authorities will be given vehicles for their operations, money for evidence purchases and any resources need to take down "high-value" targets."

"This is a new initiative that's never been done (in Nebraska) before," Kowel, said, "with federal agents and (local) police officers standing shoulder to shoulder."

If you know a healthcare professional that is experiencing an alcohol/substance use disorder, please encourage them to reach out to the [NE LAP](#) at **800-851-2336** or **402-354-8055** to begin their recovery process.

**Michelle Hruska, LIMHP, LADC**

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\*Article written by Kevin Cole, Omaha World-Herald, Jan. 26, 2022.