# Massachusetts Sees 10% Decrease in Drug Overdose Deaths in 2023, First Decline in Four Years



Provisional data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates a 10 percent decrease in drug overdose deaths in Massachusetts in 2023 compared to 2022. This marks the first annual decline in four years. In 2023, Massachusetts recorded 2,373 confirmed overdose deaths, down from the 2,647 deaths reported in 2022. Since 2000, the opioid crisis has claimed the lives of 25,000 residents in the state.

Deirdre Calvert, director of the state's Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, expressed cautious optimism about the decline while acknowledging that over 2,000 deaths remain unacceptably high. She attributed the decrease to improved prevention and overdose safety efforts, which included distributing over 250,000 doses of naloxone, expanding access to housing without sobriety requirements, and providing fentanyl test strips.

Julie Burns, CEO of RIZE Massachusetts, highlighted the state's efforts in outreach and support, specifically praising the SafeSpot helpline, which connects individuals using drugs with an operator who can call for assistance during an overdose.

Nationally, the CDC reported a 5.1 percent decrease in overdose deaths. However, states such as Alaska, Washington, and Oregon saw significant increases in reported overdoses.

Leo Beletsky, director of Northeastern University's Action Lab, described the reduction as "unequivocally good news" but cautioned that one year's data is insufficient to declare a lasting trend. He noted that long-term efforts and changes in drug supply could be contributing factors and stressed the importance of continued vigilance in combating overdoses.

Fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid, has been a significant contributor to the rise in fatal overdoses. The Department of Public Health in Massachusetts plans to release its next report on June 12, tracking trends and providing further insights into the state's efforts to address the crisis.