

# Families Of Fentanyl Victims Rally At N.C. Capitol, Call For Action Against Cartels, Dealers

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Patricia Drewes and families at the N.C. Capitol. Source: Patricia Drewes

By David Larson  
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Loved ones of those who died in the ongoing opioid epidemic gathered at the North Carolina Capitol in Raleigh to mark the first National Fentanyl Prevention and Awareness Day. People gathered to mourn the tragic loss of life and to demand action from government officials.

Patricia Drewes, who lost her only child, Heaven, to a fentanyl overdose in 2019, told Carolina Journal in an Aug. 21 interview, that she organized the event after learning that the federal Drug Enforcement Agency had declared Aug. 21 the first annual Fentanyl Awareness Day. She had been planning a "Rise Up" rally on fentanyl in October but shifted the date.

"I fight so that she did not die in vain," Drewes said on why she organizes on the issue. "And that's one thing I'm adamant about. She did not die for nothing."

Drewes said her group, the Forgotten Victims of Vance, Granville, Franklin and Warren Counties, was an organic meeting of mothers who had lost their children to opioid, especially fentanyl, overdoses.



She said she is also in Lost Voices of Fentanyl, a national group that has over 20,000 people, so she is not surprised at the kind of response she gets when organizing gatherings.

“We see it every day; every day it’s several new moms on that Facebook page that just lost their child to fentanyl poisoning,” Drewes said. “My daughter is on a billboard in Kentucky. On that billboard there is a 15-year-old girl, a 14-year-old boy, and a 2-year-old baby, all dead from fentanyl. It’s an epidemic.”

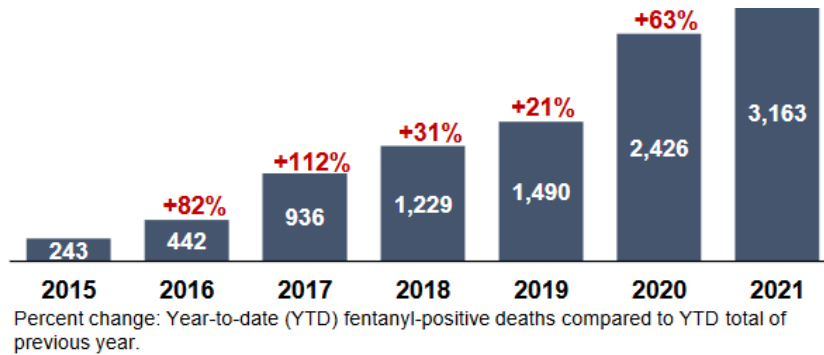
The numbers confirm Drewes’ analysis. While only about 5,000 people typically died from drug overdoses per year in the United States, this number jumped to over 10,000 per year in the late 1990s due to a surge in heroin use. But the current problem now dwarfs those numbers, with 107,000 dying last year from overdoses, [according to the Centers for Disease Control](#). The majority of these deaths, over 71,000, were due to fentanyl.

The most-recent data released by the North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner showed that in 2021, fentanyl-overdose deaths hit a record, with 3,163. This was a 30% increase from the 2,426 deaths the year before.

In the first quarter of 2022, the NCOCME reported a 5% increase in overall overdose deaths from 2021, showing 2022 is on track to meet, or maybe even exceed, last year’s record devastation.

For Drewes, she thinks both the national and state governments have failed to address this disaster.

“It’s made in China in illegal labs and is sent straight to Mexican cartels and through our open southern borders,” Drewes said. “We’ve got children being murdered, and they are being murdered. They’re being deceived to death. They don’t know they’re getting fentanyl.”



*Graphic illustrating North Carolina fentanyl deaths by year, as reported by NCOCME*

She said the answer is to close the southern border and to take the fight to the drug cartels.

“And another thing, public service announcements,” she said. “When COVID came out, within weeks we knew exactly what to do. We need public service telling people what to do with fentanyl. We need people in the schools educating our children. We need to educate our parents.”

In addition, Drewes said North Carolina needs to use the death-by-distribution law that was passed in 2019. The law gave prosecutors across the state the right to charge distributors with a felony if their product led to someone’s death.

A [WCNC story](#) from early 2022 showed that after two years on the books, the death-by-distribution law had been used fewer than 75 times despite around 7,000 people dying of drug overdoses in the state during that period.

“We need to see to it that the death-by-distribution law is enforced in this state; and it’s not happening,” Drewes said. “Of those five counties [in her congressional district], only one has ever had any death-by-distribution prosecutions, and that being Franklin County. We need a statewide protocol on how every law-enforcement agency addresses these deaths and how they investigate.”

She said that those who are recklessly giving people, including kids, drugs that they know will likely kill them, deserve the up-to-40-year sentences called for in the law.

“It’s not like they don’t know they’re poisoning people,” Drewes said. “They know. They know and they don’t care. It’s all about the God-almighty dollar. My child died for what, \$10? My only child. No, I’m not going to take that lying down. And I tell people all the time; my child is gone. This is about saving yours.”

