

**RALEIGH, N.C.** — More than 40 families came together Saturday at the Public Safety and Justice Conference at NC State University.

Eight North Carolinians die each day from fentanyl poisoning, and over 13,376 died from fentanyl from 2013 to November 2022.

Barb Walsh, founder and executive director of the Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina, lost her daughter 24-year-old daughter, Sophia, to fentanyl poisoning. Now she's trying to connect others who've lost loved ones to fentanyl.

"Other people who lost a child to fentanyl, or loved one, they shouldn't stand alone," Walsh said. "I felt like we would all be stronger if we stood together."

One of the people Walsh's group helps support is Jessica Gyant, who lost her son on New Years Day in 2021.

"January 1, 2021, I lost my son, Jerry Jeffery Snider Jr.," Gyant said. "I'm here today learn more about this drug, because I want to save a life."

The Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina wants to see fentanyl awareness speakers in middle and high schools across the state to vocalize the dangers of the drug.

The group also wants Naloxone, commonly known as Narcan, in every school, currently it is not.

According to the Center for Disease Control, as of 2022, fentanyl is the leading cause of death in North Carolina, and the United States, for people between the ages of 18 and 35.

In addition, according to the state, of the 9,116 medicine and drug toxicology deaths between 2020 and 2022, 8,002 involved fentanyl.

Mitchico Duff's daughter, Michiko, was one of those deaths.

"She was left alone, she was 23-years-old, she has a 6-year-old daughter that is left behind," Duff said.

Duff was joined by her other daughter and granddaughter at the event, where they called out for people to join them in raising awareness of the drug.

"We're asking the public to stand with us, to speak out. If you see something, say something." Duff said.

Attorney General Josh Stein also spoke at the event, where he told families he's asking the state legislature for funding for a fentanyl trafficking unit.