



PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
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# THE FENTANYL CRISIS: A NATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION PLAN

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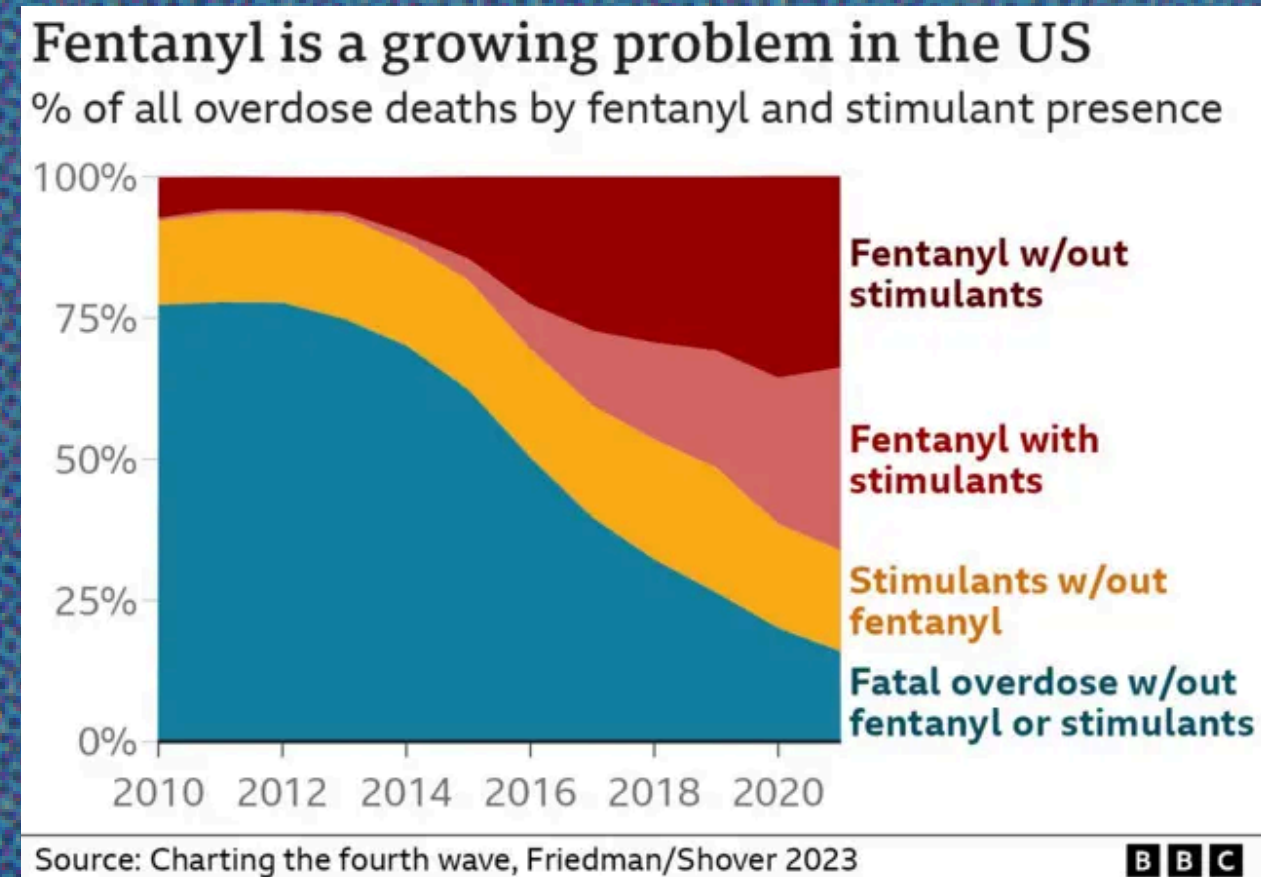
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# INTRODUCTION



## THE NATIONAL FENTANYL POISONING EMERGENCY

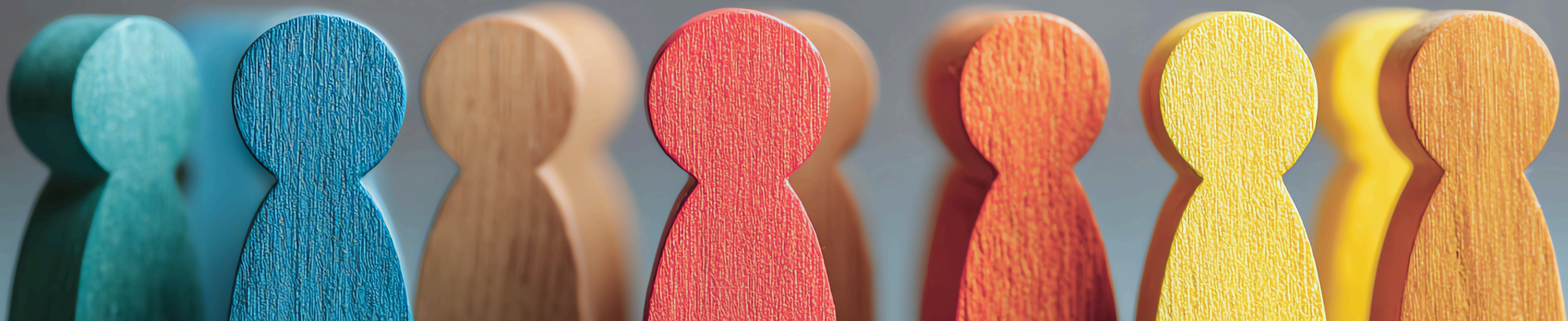
- **ILLEGAL FENTANYL IS NOW THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR ADULTS AGES 18-45**
- **70,000+ DEATHS ANNUALLY, LARGELY FROM COUNTERFEIT PILLS MISTAKEN FOR REAL MEDICATIONS**
- **CRISIS NOW AFFECTS TEENS, YOUNG ADULTS, PROFESSIONALS, AND FIRST-TIME/OCCASIONAL USERS**

## THE COMMUNICATION PROBLEM

- **PUBLIC OPINION IS FRAGMENTED AND INFLUENCED BY MISINFORMATION, STIGMA, AND POLITICAL BLAME**
- **COMPETING NARRATIVES PREVENT SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE CRISIS**
- **A COORDINATED PUBLIC-OPINION CAMPAIGN MUST DELIVER CLARITY, COMPASSION, AND ACTIONABLE SOLUTIONS**



(CDC, 2023), (NIDA, 2024), (NIDA, 2024)



# TARGET AUDIENCE

THE FENTANYL CRISIS IS NATIONWIDE, BUT SHIFTING PUBLIC OPINION REQUIRES FOCUSING ON GROUPS WITH HIGHEST VULNERABILITY AND HIGHEST INFLUENCE.

## PRIMARY AUDIENCE: PARENTS OF TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS (AGES 12-26)

- PROTECTIVE BUT OFTEN UNAWARE OF RISKS LINKED TO COUNTERFEIT PILLS AND EXPERIMENTATION (NIDA, 2022).
- HIGHLY RESPONSIVE TO EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING AND EXPERT INSTITUTIONAL GUIDANCE (SLATER & ROUNER, 2002).
- KEY MESSENGERS FOR SHAPING YOUTH AWARENESS AND INITIATING SAFETY CONVERSATIONS.

## SECONDARY AUDIENCE: LOCAL COMMUNITY OPINION LEADERS

- INCLUDES:
- SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
  - PTA MEMBERS
  - CLERGY AND FAITH LEADERS
  - YOUTH SPORTS ORGANIZERS
  - COMMUNITY CENTER DIRECTORS
  - NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION LEADERS

(NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE [NIDA], 2024), (SLATER & ROUNER, 2002)

**STORIES DRIVE  
BELIEF CHANGE**

**PARENTS  
UNDERESTIMATE  
RISK**

**COMMUNITY  
LEADERS WANT TO  
ACT BUT LACK  
TOOLS**

**STIGMA BLOCKS  
HONEST  
CONVERSATION**

**TRUST COMES  
FROM SPECIFIC  
MESSENGERS**

# **AUDIENCE INSIGHTS**

# STRATEGY

## KEY STRATEGY:

**SHIFT PUBLIC OPINION FROM SEEING FENTANYL DEATHS AS ISOLATED TRAGEDIES TO RECOGNIZING THEM AS PREVENTABLE POISONINGS REQUIRING COLLECTIVE ACTION AND COMMUNITY READINESS.**

## KEY STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

- REFRAME THE ISSUE AS POISONING + ELEVATE HUMAN STORIES TO REDUCE STIGMA.
- EMPOWER AUDIENCES WITH TOOLS THAT MAKE PREVENTION BEHAVIORS ROUTINE.
- USE NEUTRAL, COMMUNITY-CENTERED MESSAGING TO KEEP BROAD SUPPORT ACROSS DIFFERENT GROUPS.



## PARENT STORYTELLING SERIES

### "FACES OF THE FENTANYL CRISIS"

- SHORT TESTIMONIAL VIDEOS FEATURING FAMILIES AFFECTED BY FENTANYL (INCL. JOHN CARTIER).
- HUMANIZES THE EPIDEMIC AND REDUCES STIGMA THROUGH EMOTIONAL CONNECTION.
- NEW STORY EVERY 6 WEEKS, ALIGNED WITH AWARENESS MONTHS OR PREVENTION EVENTS.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION & PREPAREDNESS

### "DOCTOR-LED WEBINARS + HARM-REDUCTION TOOLS

- MONTHLY WEBINARS TIMED WITH SEASONAL RISK SPIKES (GRADUATION, SPRING BREAK) OR NEW DATA RELEASES.
- SESSIONS ANCHORED IN RESEARCH ON:
  - HOW FENTANYL POISONING HAPPENS
  - PREVALENCE OF COUNTERFEIT PILLS

## SCHOOL & UNIVERSITY TOOLKIT

### "SAFE CAMPUSES SAVE LIVES"

- A TURNKEY TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS/UNIVERSITIES TO INTEGRATE FENTANYL-POISONING PREVENTION INTO STUDENT COMMUNICATION.
- TOOLKIT INCLUDES: ASSEMBLY SLIDES, PARENT EMAIL TEMPLATES, RA TRAINING SHEETS, POSTERS & SOCIAL ASSETS, OPTIONAL "FENTANYL SAFETY SYLLABUS STATEMENT"

# BIG IDEA + TACTICS

# 5

# CONCLUSION

THE FENTANYL CRISIS REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST URGENT AND CONFUSING PUBLIC-HEALTH THREATS IN THE UNITED STATES. IT AFFECTS FAMILIES ACROSS EVERY SOCIAL CLASS, INCLUDING THOSE WITH NO HISTORY OF DRUG USE, UNDERSCORING HOW WIDESPREAD AND UNPREDICTABLE FENTANYL POISONING HAS BECOME (CDC, 2023; CICCARONE, 2017). THIS CAMPAIGN REFRAMES THE CRISIS AS A PREVENTABLE POISONING—NOT A MORAL FAILING—BY COMBINING POWERFUL STORYTELLING WITH CLEAR, EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLS THAT COMMUNITIES CAN USE. IF SUCCESSFUL, PARENTS WILL BETTER UNDERSTAND THE URGENCY OF THE CRISIS, STIGMA AROUND HARM-REDUCTION TOOLS WILL DECREASE, AND SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS WILL BE MORE WILLING TO ADOPT SAFETY MEASURES (ELLIS ET AL., 2024). ULTIMATELY, SHIFTING PUBLIC OPINION IN THIS WAY CAN BUILD BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR PREVENTION POLICIES AND SAVE LIVES BY REDUCING THE CHANCES THAT TEENS UNKNOWINGLY ENCOUNTER LETHAL COUNTERFEIT PILLS (BARRY ET AL., 2014).

**THANK YOU**

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