U.N. Report: Nearly 66% of Global Drug Deaths Are From Opioids

Nearly 35 million people are estimated to be suffering from substance use disorders worldwide.

July 2, 2019 By Casey Halter

If you thought the opioid crisis was nearing its end, think again. The latest report from the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) has found that heroin and prescription painkillers are responsible for nearly two thirds of drug-related deaths around the world, a recent press release from the organization reports.

The UNDOC's latest World Drug Report estimates that nearly 35 million people have substance use disorders worldwide—an increase of nearly 30% over the past 10 years. A 10% increase in the global population ages 15 to 64 is partly to blame. However, experts say the rest can be attributed to increased opioid use in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America as well as higher cannabis consumption in North and South America and in Asia. The agency says cocaine production also reached an all-time high in 2017, with an estimated production of nearly 2,000 tons.

However, the press release makes clear that opioids worry drug researchers the most. According to the latest UNDOC numbers, 11 million people injected drugs in 2017; of these, 1.4 million are living with HIV, and 5.6 million are living with hepatitis C virus. In the United States and Canada, fentanyl and other synthetic opioids are causing the most harm, leading to over 51,000 reported overdoses. And countries in West, Central, and North Africa are experiencing an opioid crisis around another drug, Tramadol, a narcotic-like pain reliever.

Meanwhile, the report reveals that only one in seven drug users around the world are receiving treatment for their addiction.

"The findings of this year's World Drug Report fill in and further complicate the global picture of drug challenges, underscoring the need for broader international cooperation to advance balanced and integrated health and criminal justice responses to supply and demand," said Yury Fedotov, UNODC's executive director, in a statement.

To learn more about the ongoing "War on Drugs" and its effects on the global opioid, hepatitis C and opioid epidemics, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/un-report-nearly-66-global-drug-deaths-opioids