



**Councilmember Marni von Wilpert**  
**Councilmember Raul Campillo**  
*City of San Diego*  
**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** December 16, 2022

**TO:** Charles Modica, Independent Budget Analyst

**FROM:** Councilmember Marni von Wilpert

Councilmember Raul Campillo

**SUBJECT:** Combating the Fentanyl Crisis

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Too many San Diego families are experiencing the tragedy of lives lost to opioid overdoses, especially from fentanyl. Last year the number of overdose deaths surged 33 percent in San Diego, from 976 in 2020 to 1,303 in 2021. While other substances including methamphetamine, cocaine and alcohol were the cause of some of the accidental overdose deaths, the recent surge in the presence of fentanyl, a synthetic and hard-to-detect opioid up to 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine, has fueled the increase in deaths.

Earlier this week, the Washington Post profiled the City of San Diego's fentanyl crisis, citing San Diego as ground zero for fentanyl trafficking into the United States. By 2019, fentanyl deaths in San Diego had risen 787 percent over a period of five years. Last year, the County of San Diego reported 814 fentanyl-related deaths, as we know, this year that number is growing. The fentanyl crisis is hitting our unsheltered residents particularly hard. The County Medical Examiner's Office counted more than 200 homeless San Diegans who died of overdoses involving fentanyl last year, and data for the first quarter of 2022 showed fentanyl deaths among people experiencing homelessness were up 23 percent this year so far.

This epidemic is also greatly affecting youth in San Diego. In 2021, 22 young people under the age of 21, including 12 teens under the age of 18, died from a fentanyl overdose in San Diego County. According to the California Department of Public Health Overdose Surveillance Dashboard, opioid-related overdose deaths in California's youth ages 10-19 years increased from 54 in 2018 to 274 in 2020, marking a 407% increase over two years, largely driven by fentanyl. In addition, fentanyl-related overdose deaths in California's youth ages 10-19 years increased from 36 in 2018 to 261 in 2020, a 625% increase. We must work together to educate our youth about the dangers of fentanyl and protect them from this dangerous drug.

In December 2021, the County and the City of San Diego today opened a Community Harm Reduction Team, 44-bed shelter for people experiencing homelessness and who are struggling with substance use disorders or mental health issues or both. Family Health Centers and Alpha Project partnered to provide behavioral health services, case management, and connections to permanent housing and medical care. In September 2022, the City and County opened a new shelter in the Midway District near Rosecrans, able to house up to 150 people. This shelter too has mental health and drug treatment services on-site.

On October 25, 2022, the County of San Diego approved a “Comprehensive Approach to the Opioid Crisis and Adoption of the San Diego County Opioid Settlement Framework.” (see attached). On November 29, 2022, Mayor Todd Gloria issued an Executive Order to combat the fentanyl crisis here in San Diego. In relevant part, the Executive Order 2022-1 directs city staff to immediately begin work, in concert with the San Diego City Council and City Attorney, to develop a community outreach plan and spending strategy for the estimated \$30 million in [national opioid settlement](#) funding that will be coming to the city over the next eight years.

Our request to the IBA is to compile a report, and present findings to the City’s Public Safety Committee to support the Mayor’s Executive Order and the County of San Diego’s Comprehensive Approach to the Opioid Crisis to help prevent further opioid-related addiction and overdose deaths here in San Diego. The options could include, but are not limited to, policies, programs, and services being utilized in other large cities, strategies for obtaining the \$30 million national opioid settlement up front (rather than a little over \$3 million per year for 8 years), and/or recommendations to the Housing Commission, especially as it relates to our homelessness services.

The goals we would like to achieve include public education about the risks and negative health effects of opioid use disorder, including the potential for fatal overdoses; preventing San Diegans from developing opioid use disorder and related overdose deaths; helping San Diegans who are currently experiencing opioid use disorder to recover from their addictions.

One example could be supporting the County’s efforts to do emergency-room level interventions for overdose victims, as well as crisis intervention and support for families, friends, and partners when someone has experienced an overdose. Our Housing Commission and Homelessness Strategies Department, for example, could strive to have all homelessness service centers – including bridge shelters – have access to on-site substance abuse counselors and medicated assisted treatment options. We would welcome any ideas for helping unsheltered individuals who are being preyed upon by fentanyl drug dealers – including safe camping sites. We also welcome strategies to support the City Attorney’s work to help serial misdemeanants, homeless court, or drug court programs.

Fortunately, the County of San Diego and the City have become closer partners in combating public health crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to work alongside the County to help bring an end to the deadly opioid epidemic. We stand ready to do our part to address the fentanyl crisis here in San Diego.

CC: Hon. Mayor Todd Gloria  
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