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Jun 20, 2023 Updated Jun 20, 2023

In the wake of last year's settlement reached by Johnson & Johnson and the drug distributors AmerisourceBergan, Cardinal Health and McKesson, payments are finally being paid out to affected regions of the nation. Frankfort and Franklin County are no exception.

The \$26 billion settlement will be paid out as an annuity over the next 18 years, and is based on several factors, which according to the settlement's website include the amount of opioid medications shipped into the state, number of opioid-related deaths and the number of residents still battling opioid addiction.

This settlement ended more than 3,000 individual and class-action claims against these agencies nationwide. Johnson & Johnson will pay out \$5 billion over the next nine years as part of the settlement, with the remainder of funds split between the three drug distributors.

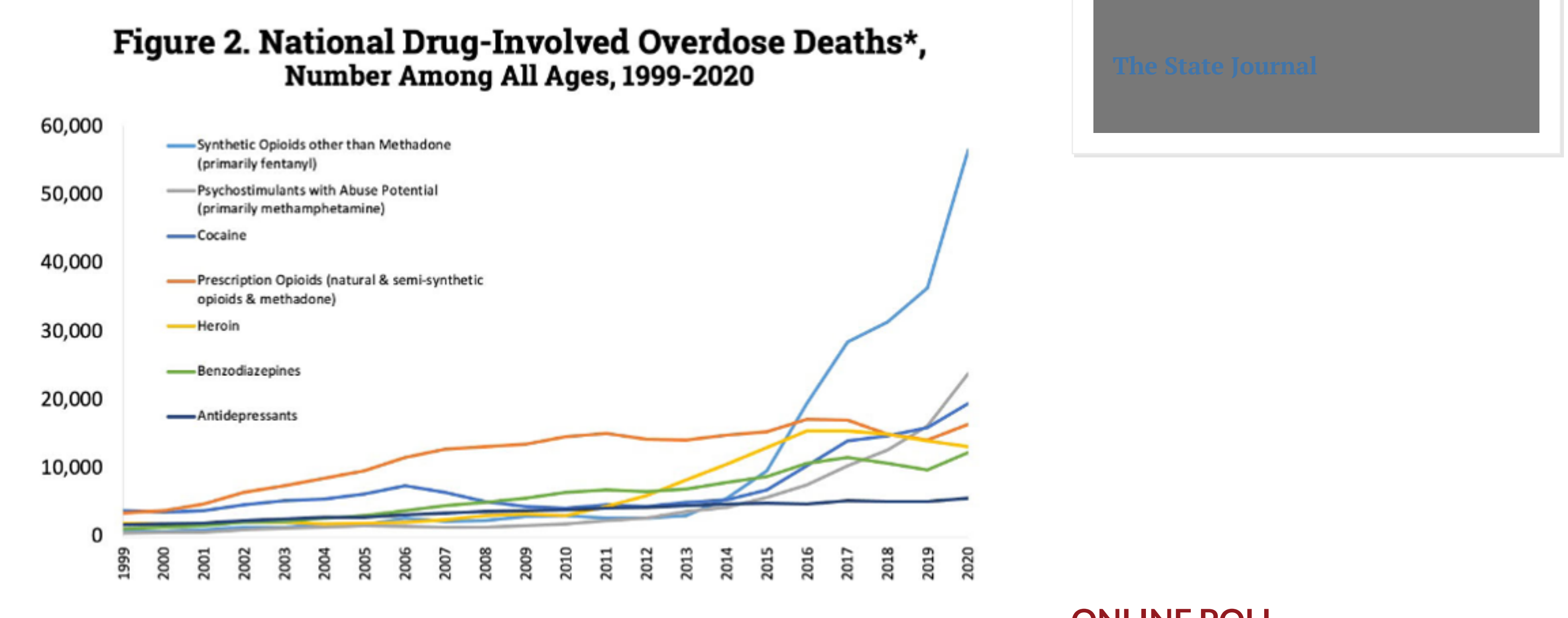
This is separate from the massive Purdue Pharma settlement reached in 2020, and still stuck in a legal gray area following attempts by the Sackler family to seek bankruptcy protections. Federal officials have blocked these attempts so far, but the Sacklers will not have to face further civil litigation from private individuals.

The Sacklers, a family of physicians who purchased the drug company Purdue-Frederick in the early 1950s, still do not admit to any wrongdoing with regards to opioid abuse. The company was charged with pushing physicians to prescribe strong opioids while also actively downplaying the addictive nature of products like OxyContin, which PurduePharma began producing in the mid-1990s.

The family, and their company, were featured in the recent documentary film "Crime of the Century" on HBO and the miniseries "Dopesick" on Hulu.

Regardless of the amount, each municipality and county are required to spend the majority of the payouts from this Johnson & Johnson settlement on what the ruling calls "abatement of opioid drug use."

According to documentation released earlier this month by the Kentucky League of Cities, in 2022 and 2023, the city of Frankfort will have received an estimated \$66,000, and Franklin County will have received approximately \$240,000.



*Includes deaths with underlying causes of unintentional drug poisoning (S00-S04), suicide drug poisoning (S05-S06), homicide drug poisoning (S07), and deaths with unspecified cause of poisoning (S10-S14), but excludes deaths from intentional self-harm (T40-T42). Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2020 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released 12/20/21.

This graph shows the sharp increase in synthetic opioid overdose deaths through 2020, and the distinct drop that spike in rates of prescription opioid deaths immediately before and after the COVID pandemic. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Both the Frankfort City Commission and Franklin County Fiscal Court will be the governing bodies regarding the funding for implementing programs to assist those struggling with addiction and its aftermath, but those decisions have yet to be announced. But most of the efforts in other communities have been led by public health agencies, who have the most immediate contact with affected populations.

So we asked, what programs are available to help local residents prevent or treat opioid addiction, and could potentially be helped with funds from the settlement?

Franklin County Health Department Public Health Director Judy Mattingly explained that "our focus will definitely be in primary prevention."

According to the most recent data compiled by the Kentucky Office for Drug Control Policy, in 2021 there were 34 drug overdose deaths in Franklin County, and a statewide increase in overdose deaths of 14.5% over 2021 figures. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that in 2020 Franklin County maintained an average dispensing rate of 48.7 opioid prescriptions per 100 people, 4 above the national average.

These dispensing rates are based on the location of the prescribing medical professional, and also include all prescriptions no matter the dosage or pill count.

An overwhelming percentage of overdoses are due to multiple drug consumption. Fentanyl was identified in over 72.8% of all overdose fatalities, followed by methamphetamine, acetyl fentanyl, oxycodone, heroin, morphine, alprazolam (Xanax), and gabapentin (Neurontin). Any one of these drugs can prove fatal on their own, but when used in combination, the likelihood of overdose increases exponentially.

In a study released by the National Institutes of Health in 2021, between 2015 and 2020 deaths from heroin, benzodiazepines and non-synthetic opioids have fallen gradually, however overdose deaths from those same drugs in combination with synthetic opioids like fentanyl have spiked six-fold.

So what does this mean for opioid abatement targets in our community? And how can these funds help our public health officials to address the staggering number of overdoses in our community?

Amelia Berry, grant manager of the Franklin County Health Department's Overdose 2 Action Program, said, "I hope they [fiscal court] will consider the need to address both immediate harms for people who are already experiencing opioid addiction, and to really take this opportunity to go from reactive to proactive mode, including primary prevention — stopping something before it gets started."

"Those types of prevention efforts, as well as the efforts of treatment centers and a lot of different players in the community did lead to a decrease in 2018, but now we have to figure out how we move in a coordinated, strategic way to bring those numbers down again," she added.

Mattingly explained more of the issues facing addiction abatement during the pandemic.

"It was harder to get into treatment centers during the height of the pandemic, with all of the restrictions, masking, and capacity and staffing issues. It was a perfect storm."

Overdose deaths spiked during COVID, with 1,964 overdose deaths in Kentucky in 2020 (a 49% increase over 2019), and 2,250 overdose deaths in 2021 (a 14.5% increase over 2020). The report compiled by the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy further details that some form of opioid was involved in 90% of all overdose deaths in Kentucky, with fentanyl detected in more than 70% of cases in both Kentucky and the U.S. as a whole.

"The fact that we were able to decrease rates of addiction in our community tells us that we have some tools that work. We just have to figure out where the gaps are in need that we can address to move things back to where we were before the pandemic," Berry continued.

The health department has focused a lot of recent energies on their new "Just Say Yes" program, a pilot project conducted with the Frankfort Independent Schools that they hope will be able to be expanded throughout the county to assist more families and children who are in high-risk populations for drug abuse by offering free or low-cost programs allowing kids to stay physically active or get involved in academic or creative endeavors that studies have shown to help in reducing high-risk behaviors in young people.

The "Yes Card" program has been able to help fund healthy activities for kids in the pilot program, allowing them to access sports, arts and academic programs outside of normal school hours. There is also a youth survey in the program, which will give the FCHD local data on the efficacy of their primary prevention efforts.

Berry has participated an international conference where she presented the "Just Say Yes" program, which is based on what public health officials call "the Icelandic model" of proactive intervention. This model, which relies on what researchers describe as "focusing on reducing known risk factors for substance use, while strengthening a broad range of parental, school and community protective factors."

Helping kids address mental health concerns is another major component of the "Just Say Yes" program.

"We want to strategically invest these funds in a way that will prevent more than just one issue," Berry said. "Our Parent Cafe program is another way that we can hope to improve outcomes across the board — academic health, physical health, mental health, behavioral health."

"This is something that we are excited to continue with our school districts, the Wanda Joyce Robinson Foundation, Sunshine Center, Women and Families shelter, First Corinthian Missionary Baptist Church and South Frankfort Presbyterian Church."

This kind of early intervention is key.

"We really feel like it is true public health to focus on this primary prevention and focus on our children before they have these exposures," Mattingly explained. "I really look at it as the Yes Card is providing the mentorship and protective factors for the students, and the Parent Cafes are doing the same thing, but for the parents. Because our parents need support, too!"

The health department also credits their syringe exchange program in helping to address addiction issues in recent years. Nationally, participants in exchange programs greatly decrease the likelihood of contracting Hepatitis B, C, or HIV, are five times more likely to enter a drug treatment program, and according to the CDC are over three times more likely to stop using injectable drugs, including opioids.

The same CDC study showed that over 90% of needles distributed are returned to exchange programs nationwide. This includes Franklin County, where in 2021 of the estimated 163,000 needles distributed to the approximately 1,200 unique participants in the exchange program, 147,000 have been returned.

When asked if the FCHD had experienced any pushback regarding the needle-exchange program, Mattingly said, "We were the second syringe exchange to open in Kentucky, Northern Kentucky, then us, then Lexington one right after another. And we are lucky in that we had the support of the fiscal court and the city commission that was required to open the program."

"Knock on wood, there haven't been any complaints about it since then. But what we really hope to do is work ourselves out of this program. If we could get all of our children at an early age to have more resources — instead of feeling that heroin or injecting drugs is their only option," she continued.

Naloxone training and rescue kit distribution is another main component of abatement programs, and the Franklin County Health Department offers free, online training in how to use these kits (more commonly seen under the brand name Narcan).

Visitors to www.fchd.org/freenarcan can watch a 10-minute video that walks them through the steps to follow should someone experience an opioid overdose, and how to properly administer a dose of naloxone (one spray quickly and directly into a nostril), followed by chest compressions. Once a participant successfully takes a quiz on the site, they are directed to a sign-up form to receive their emergency naloxone kit.

The Agency for Substance Abuse Policy Board (ASAP) also meets monthly, and focuses on direct intervention programs provided through 30-40 different agencies around the area.

"Treatment centers, churches, schools, city and county governments, law enforcement — having these agencies collaborating and being actively involved is key for our coordination efforts," Berry said.

The proposed overdose response team detailed by Frankfort Police Chief Dustin Bowman at the Jan. 9 city commission meeting is also something that the FCHD hopes will be implemented in the near future.

With so many programs already planned to address the issues of addiction, particularly opioid addiction, the ongoing efforts of the Franklin County Health Department and all of their associated agencies and organizations hope to provide a safety system to protect and aid the community. Frankfort and Franklin County's allocation of the Johnson & Johnson opioid settlement arriving means that these programs can reach their target audiences sooner rather than later.

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