

From Mass Shootings to Overdose Deaths: Connecting the Dots

Forbes published Co-Founder and Managing Partner [Harry Nelson](#)'s latest article: [From Mass Shootings to Overdose Deaths: Connecting the Dots](#). Harry's article brings light to the connection of the recent [mass shootings in El Paso and Dayton](#) to the rise of opioid overdoses in recent years.

From the article:

What's the connection between mass shootings and opioid overdoses? It's not the instruments of harm. Most of the coverage of mass shootings focuses on the ubiquity of guns. The opioid conversation revolves around drug makers or, lately, drug traffickers. They do have some commonalities: our media cycle craves easy-to-digest stories with identifiable bad guys, and few industries are as easy to villainize these days as gun and drug manufacturers. Please don't mistake my interest in changing the subject as an apology or whitewash of the bad actors in either industry. I'm just tired of a narrow focus that makes for interesting journalism but keeps us from getting at the roots of the problems. I want to change the conversation to what we can do about the real issues.

As we dig deeper and think more broadly about what's going wrong, a parallel emerges: we are seeing more and more mass shooters alongside explosive growth in people overdosing and struggling with addiction. If readers take away one thing from *The United States of Opioids*, I hope it will be that the distress emanates not simply from pharmaceutical misconduct or doctor overprescribing, but from a massive, underlying crisis, with social, mental health, and spiritual dimensions. This point is most evident when we compare opioid crisis deaths with prior drug overdose death trends. Opioid overdose deaths started spiking 20 years ago driven by the popularity of Oxycontin. Yet a [University of Pittsburgh 2018 study](#) highlights that the wave of drug-related deaths was already rising exponentially beginning in the late 1970s. The drugs were different from place to place and time to time, but the overall trendline fits together tightly. In this light, the crackdowns on crack, meth, and now opioids have been like the old arcade game, "whack-a-mole": we bring the hammer down on one drug, disrupting the supply, and people shift to another drug. Overdose deaths keep on rising.

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