

# Data-Driven Responses to the Opioid Crisis (and Beyond)

Catching Up with COSSAP, April 2020 Edition

The substance abuse epidemic is at a breaking point. Better drug surveillance is needed, but many jurisdictions do not systematically collect, analyze, and apply available data to their drug problems. Timely information sharing between community partners, such as law enforcement and public health agencies, is one way to better facilitate the implementation and evaluation of strategies to curb the rising rate of opioid, stimulant, and polysubstance use.

## NFLIS Drug Program

Attendees of the “Evolution of Drugs of Abuse: How to Keep Up with the Changing Landscape” session at the 2020 COAP National Forum in March heard [DeMia Pressley](#), program officer with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s (DEA) National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS), provide an invaluable tutorial on precisely that subject.

Since 1997, the NFLIS-Drug program has collected monthly drug analysis results obtained in drug seizures from law enforcement actions from federal, state, and local drug laboratories. A total of 282 individual laboratories across all 50 states and 104 county or municipal laboratories/ laboratory systems participate in the program.

Data from the NFLIS-Drug program help to illustrate changes in indicators of drug patterns geographically and over time using drug estimates; provide information about the diversion of prescription drugs; and identify emerging drugs of abuse and changes in drug availability. In particular,

NFLIS-Drug data can identify trends to help communities monitor changing dynamics of use patterns. For example, **Figure 1** shows that 12 states witnessed an increase of between 100 percent and 250 percent in fentanyl reports between 2017 and 2018. **Figure 2** shows that Connecticut, New York, and Washington saw increases of 100 percent or more in carfentanil reports in 2017 and 2018.

DEA recently issued a new report series, NFLIS-Drug Snapshot, which provides timely data for local and state agencies to monitor emerging drug threats. The December

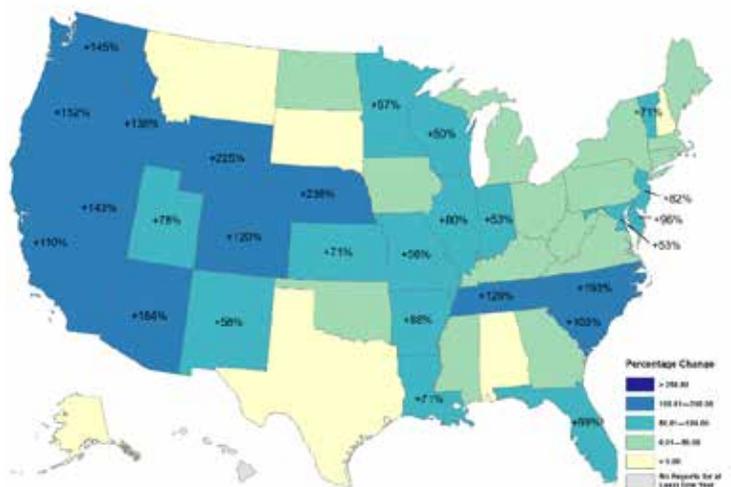


Figure 1. Percentage Change in Fentanyl Reports in NFLIS-Drug, by State: 2017–2018

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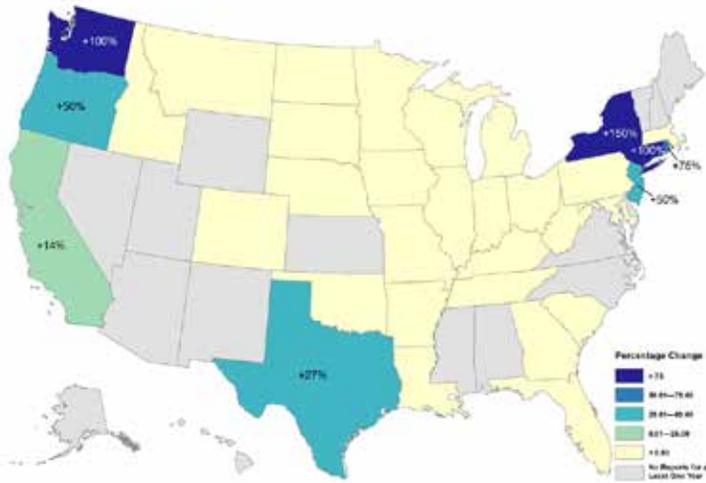


Figure 2. Percentage Change in Carfentanil Reports in NFLIS-Drug, by State: 2017–2018

DEA is expanding NFLIS-Drug to include two additional continuous data collection programs: one that reports public and private toxicology laboratories' toxicological findings from ante- and postmortem testing –NFLIS-Tox; and a second that reports medical examiner and coroner offices' data on deaths in which any drugs were identified –NFLIS-MEC. Staff recruitment is under way. Any toxicology laboratories, medical examiner, or coroner offices interested in joining NFLIS are encouraged to contact RTI International, DEA's NFLIS contractor, at [deanflis@rti.org](mailto:deanflis@rti.org). Until the two new programs are operational, all published [NFLIS-Drug reports](#), along with the [NFLIS Public Resource Library](#), are available to the public and provide helpful state, regional, and national data summaries.

[2019 Snapshot is available online](#) and displays data reported to NFLIS-Drug between October 1 and December 31, 2019. In this instance, the Snapshot highlighted steep upward trends in the use of eutylone, flualprazolam, alpha-PiHP, and fluoro-MDMB-PICA.