



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency  
Pennsylvania Forensic Drug Chemistry Surveillance Project

10/01/19 Grant Start → 09/30/22 Grant End

## Overview

In recent years, the prevalence of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances in decedent toxicology reports in Pennsylvania has increased dramatically, from 28 percent of reported overdose deaths in 2015 to 70 percent in 2017. Recent analysis from the Drug Enforcement Administration's 2016 and 2017 Emerging Threat Reports suggest that a novel substance affects Pennsylvania's communities approximately every 2.5 weeks. This quickly changing drug supply, combined with the high potency of illicit synthetic opioids, creates conditions for multiple overdoses within a short period of time ("overdose spikes"), with little to no data available to intervene until it is too late. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy's Program Evaluation and Research Unit, selected five counties as sites for the proposed statewide project: Beaver, Franklin, Lackawanna, Schuylkill, and Washington. These counties

were chosen on the basis of (1) their engagement with the Pennsylvania Opioid Overdose Reduction Technical Assistance Center to support strategic planning and coordinated responses to the opioid epidemic; (2) existing strategic plans' alignment with project goals; (3) levels of risk and need, as measured by fatal overdose deaths, prevalence of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances in overdose deaths, and other relevant data; (4) geographic location; and (5) designation as High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTAs).

## Grant Focus

- Prioritize real-time data collection, analysis, and dissemination.
- Link data sets to identify trends and focus resources.

## Program Approach

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency will sponsor the Forensic Drug Chemistry Surveillance Project to support five counties (Beaver, Franklin, Lackawanna, Schuylkill, and Washington) in establishing new quantitative, real-time forensic drug chemistry analysis workflow protocols. These new protocols will identify responsive strategies that enhance investigations by connecting cases and promoting rapid dissemination of critical information. Accurate, complete, and timely forensic drug chemistry data in a region can help law enforcement agencies plan strategic and immediate responses based on local needs; larger public safety investigative agencies will be able to use the drug intelligence to monitor trends and intercept drug trafficking routes. Improved drug testing will also enhance public information sharing about the dangers of drugs in the community. NMS Laboratories will be conducting the toxicology analyses of confiscated drugs.

Goals and objectives of the project include the following:

- Create a quantitative, real-time forensic drug chemistry workflow in each county that can be used to identify responsive strategies that support investigations, connect cases, and improve drug intelligence and community surveillance goals. This goal will be achieved by:
  1. Creating a stakeholder steering committee in each county to shape and improve the forensic drug chemistry workflow and dissemination system.
  2. Developing an algorithm for determining the minimum number of samples of confiscated drugs that should be submitted for forensic drug chemistry to assess drug surveillance trends with statistical validity.
  3. Creating a protocol to efficiently add quantitative, real-time forensic drug chemistry capability to an existing workflow and sustain it.

4. Developing, implementing, and sustaining a reporting mechanism to provide actionable information in real time as well as larger trend analysis to designated public safety and health officials in each county.
  - Assess the validity and reliability of the quantitative, real-time drug chemistry workflow.

## Project Partners

- Program Evaluation and Research Unit, School of Pharmacy, University of Pittsburgh
- Beaver, Franklin, Lackawanna, Schuylkill, Washington counties
- NMS Laboratories

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