

HHS Using Real-Time Data to Help Combat the Opioid Crisis

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Through a donation from Millennium Health, HHS will leverage real-time data to develop targeted approaches to fighting the opioid crisis.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [has announced](#) an agreement with Millennium Health, an accredited specialty laboratory, to combat the opioid crisis using near real-time drug testing data.

Millennium Health's Emerging Threat Intelligence Program will donate data that includes regular reporting of drug use trends from definitive urine drug test results obtained from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and multiple medical practice types that can identify community level indicators of illicit drug use.

The de-identified and aggregate data will enable enhanced surveillance and analysis of emerging drug use trends, allowing officials to spot patterns and target drug use interventions.

In a [report](#) published in *JAMA Network Open* on January 3, 2020, researchers evaluated Millennium Health data and found a sharp rise in the use of methamphetamine and increases in stimulant-involved overdose deaths. Since 2016, rates of positive urine drug test results have increased by 42.44 percent for methamphetamine and 75.46 percent for fentanyl.

The results also showed that among urine drug test results positive for fentanyl, methamphetamine positivity continued to increase by 153.51 percent.

Researchers highlighted the significant role that near real-time data could play in combating these trends.

"Nontraditional data sources, including urine drug tests, may provide a more timely estimation of emerging drug use prior to the reporting of drug overdose deaths. Earlier identification of these trends supports the development of targeted interventions to curb the effect of drug abuse on public health," the report authors said.

Other organizations have recognized the benefits of using real-time data to track and monitor illicit drug use. The New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) recently [developed](#) a real-time data analytics tool that helps treatment centers and counselors identify and treat drug abuse. The tool monitors online platforms like Twitter and Reddit and combines this information with geospatial data to find out where users are obtaining drugs, as well as trends or changes in drug use.

The Millennium Health data donation will build on HHS' efforts to curb the effects of the [opioid epidemic](#). In August 2019, the agency partnered with the Healthcare Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to [award](#) nearly \$400 million in grants to expand patient access to opioid treatment in rural communities and other medically underserved areas.

"Health centers and behavioral health providers are on the front lines of the fight against the opioid crisis and substance abuse, especially in rural communities," HHS Secretary Alex Azar said in a statement.

"With our evidence-based strategy, HHS is working to support local communities in fighting back against substance abuse, and our united efforts are yielding results. Together, we can end our country's opioid crisis and lay a foundation for a healthier country where every American can access the mental healthcare they need."

The new agreement with Millennium Health will give HHS access to timely data that can support the development of focused healthcare services at state and local levels. HHS expects that the collaboration will result in services that can prevent drug overdoses, reverse non-fatal overdoses, and engage individuals in treatment.

"The Trump Administration recognizes the power of current data in the multi-pronged efforts to curb the drug overdose epidemic. With frequent reporting of drug testing data, HHS can work with city, county and state public health officials to provide resources to help reduce crisis points and save lives," said Assistant Secretary for Health Admiral Brett P. Giroir, MD. "The donation of this data is critical for reducing the occurrence of the substance use epidemic and reaching the people who need help most."