

Population Health NEWS

Communities Hold the Key to Addressing the Opioid Epidemic—Here's Why

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 72,000 Americans – or 200 people a day – [died from a drug overdose in 2017](#), making it the worst year for drug overdoses in U.S. history. Nearly two-thirds of these deaths were directly linked to opioids. This is [more people](#) than have died from gun violence, car crashes or HIV/AIDs in the U.S. in a single year.

Declaring the opioid crisis a [national public health emergency](#) has continued to bring attention to an issue that is impacting communities across the country. Because there are unique elements to how this epidemic has impacted different communities, states have been experiencing a mixed bag of success in tackling the opioid epidemic.

Those like [Massachusetts, Vermont and Rhode Island](#), who have embarked on major public health campaigns and are actively working to increase access to addiction treatment services, have seen 2018 death rates decline. Conversely, many states have seen death rates increase.

The Impact of the Opioid Crisis on Life Expectancy

That's not all—according to the [CDC's Mortality in the U.S. 2016 Report](#), the opioid epidemic is also responsible for driving down U.S. life expectancy (currently 78.7 years of age) for the past two years. Early signs indicate the epidemic is on track to have the same impact on life expectancy for the [third year](#) in a row as long as drug overdoses remain the leading cause of death among Americans under 50.

These reports only make the call to action even louder for diverse, community-based solutions to this epidemic. *(continued on page 2)*

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Childhood Obesity and Declining Life Expectancy A Health Plan Addresses the Growing Problem

by Jackie Larson, President, Avantas

Life expectancy in the United States has declined two years in a row. This news from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) comes more than a decade after a *New England Journal of Medicine* report found that for the first time in two centuries, the current generation of children in the U.S. may have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. The Journal pointed to a rapid rise in childhood obesity as the biggest contributing factor.

One in three children in this country is either overweight or obese. The CDC says the percentage of children and adolescents affected by obesity has more than tripled since the 1970s. This is causing health problems in children that, in the past, were primarily seen in adults – type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and elevated cholesterol levels. Obesity will follow these children into adulthood and what could become an unending cycle of doctor and hospital visits.

As the Chief Medical Officer of L.A. Care Health Plan, the largest publicly-operated health plan in the country, I know that preventing a health problem is always better than treating it after the fact. Prevention requires education. *(continued on page 3)*