



International Narcotics  
Control Board



# OPERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO INTERDICT OPIOIDS' ILLICIT DISTRIBUTION & SALES

A Global Project of the International Narcotics Control Board



Member States acknowledge, “with grave concern, the international challenge posed by the illicit manufacture, trafficking and non-medical use of synthetic opioids.”

United Nations 61<sup>st</sup> Commission on Narcotic Drugs  
(CND), March 2018



INCB is implementing practical solutions for synthetic opioids and fentanyl-related challenges.



# A Global Response to a Growing Crisis

The *Operational Partnerships to Interdict Opioids' Illicit Distribution and Sales* (OPIOIDS) Project is a special initiative under the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) supporting national authorities' and international organizations' efforts in preventing non-medical synthetic opioids and their precursors from reaching consumer markets. Synthetic opioids are manufactured substances which may be diverted from legitimate channels, falsified medical products containing opioids, illicitly manufactured opioids, or engineered New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) intended for non-medical use. Due to their toxicity at the milligram level and significant market growth in recent years, there is a specific urgency on stemming the flow of potent fentanyl-related substances.

*"Governments should work together with public health officials, health care professionals, manufacturers and distributors of pharmaceutical products, consumer protection associations and law enforcement agencies, and promote public education about the appropriate use of prescription drugs and associated health risks."*

Dr. Viroj Sumyai, INCB President



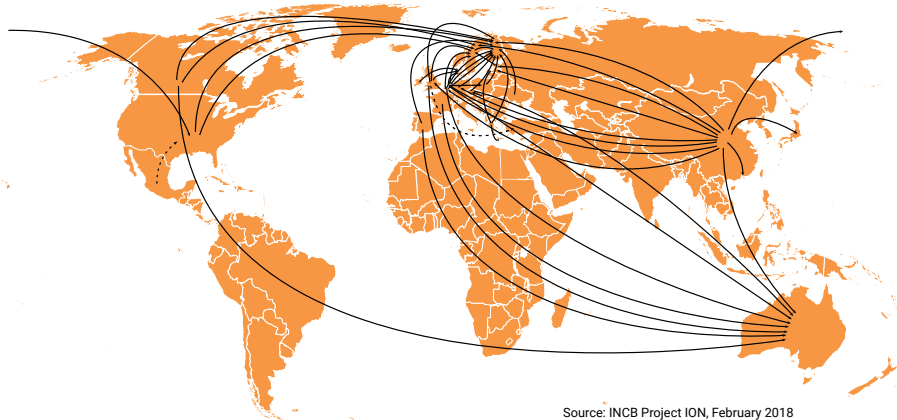
# An Escalating and Expanding Problem

The current synthetic opioids overdose crisis began in North America, but their illicit manufacture, online sales, trafficking and abuse has global consequences. Opioids are trafficked via international mail and express courier services, crisscrossing the globe from sources in East Asia to numerous re-distribution points in Europe and North America. The crisis is fuelled by powerful fentanyls, some toxic at the milligram level. Fentanyls are also detected with heroin, cocaine, LSD and fraudulent pills sold as oxycodone, among others.

Through seizures, toxicology reports and associated overdoses, Europe detected 13 new opioids in 2017 alone, 10 which were fentanyls. In Europe, tramadol accounted for the greatest number (non-heroin) opioids seizures in 2017, with 16 countries reporting seizing the substance. While some opioids may be diverted from legitimate pharmaceutical supplies, others are illegally manufactured.

Substandard, falsified or illicitly manufactured phensedyl (codeine-based) are trafficked throughout South Asia, while tramadol pills are among the most often reported synthetic opioids encountered, with 68 tons reported seized annually. MENA and African countries report significant border seizures of tramadol. The volume of these pills and emergence of cheap fentanyls offers a potential vehicle to fund organized crime or extremist groups.

Source, Routing and Destination of Fentanyl-Related Substances (2015-2016)



Inconsistent Mixing Techniques Can Lead to Overdose

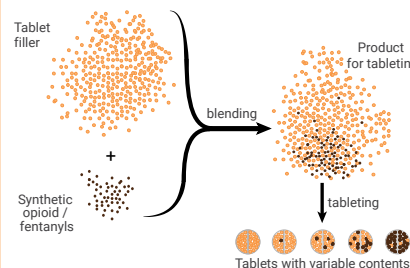
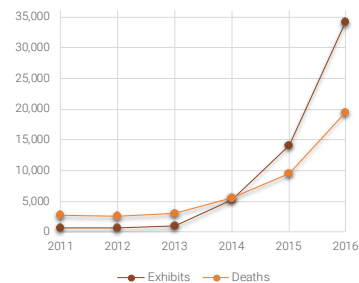


Photo: Comparison of potentially fatal doses of heroin, fentanyl and carfentanyl, as exhibited by the DEA.

Number of Opioid-related Deaths and Fentanyl Exhibits in the USA by Year, 2011-2016



## Non-medical Synthetic Opioids are also a Threat to Non-Drug Users

Synthetic opioids are often trafficked through international mail and express courier services. Due to their extreme potency law enforcement, customs, postal, canine units and first-responders are at greater risk of exposure and potential overdose.



# A Strategic Response

Within its mandate to ensure adequate supplies of drugs are available for legitimate uses, that diversion of drugs from licit sources into illicit channels does not occur, monitor controls over chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs occurs, and assist in preventing the diversion of those chemicals into the illicit traffic, the INCB is *strategically* positioned to respond to the growing opioids crisis, with tools, technical assistance and training.



**Collaborate.** Bring together international, regional, national authorities, experts from industry partners and organizations to focus specifically on developing guidelines and implementing strategies to address these new emerging threats and challenges.



**Collect, Consolidate and Communicate.** Information collection and use of advanced data analytics to develop and exchange intelligence that serves to inform the rapidly changing situation for law enforcement, regulatory and other first-responders.



**Cooperate and Create.** Partnering with UN agencies and private industry who have a role to play in responding to the crisis. These industry partners include regional and international chemical, pharmaceutical, postal, courier and transport services, and internet trading service providers. These activities are designed with the aim to align with efforts of partner agencies.



**Internet.** Counter marketing and sales of non-medical synthetic opioids on the open web and darknet by convening international experts to share information, experiences and develop practical recommendations. Leveraging existing and new tools to identify the location of those responsible for these illicit marketplaces and transactions.



**Emerging Drugs and Precursors.** Addressing availability of emerging analogues and their precursors. Engaging law enforcement, regulatory, and other relevant actors to capture and circulate incident information through PICS and IONICS communication platforms, and stop illicit manufacture.



**A Balanced Approach.** Focus on stemming the flow of non-medical synthetic opioids without compromising world-wide availability of essential medicines. Developing approaches to ensure the health and safety of industry partners and first-responders.



# Practical Activities

The activities and partnerships developed under the **OPIOIDS Project** have been specifically designed to effectively provide a balanced, practical approach to the collection and communication of actionable information and operational intelligence of these substances to relevant first-responders.



*"Fentanyl users say going back to heroin is like taking water."*

Ain Peil, Advisor, Ministry of Interior, Estonia

# Towards Long-term Sustainability

With its roots pre-dating the United Nations, the INCB is the oldest and most experienced international body to ensure that adequate supplies of drugs are available for medical and scientific uses, and that the diversion of drugs and their precursors into illicit channels does not occur.

The **OPIOIDS Project** builds upon the Board's track record of successful international operational initiatives under *Projects PRISM, Cohesion, and ION*. The Project activities began in December 2017 and align with both the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.



Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

## Our Mandate

The **OPIOIDS Project** builds upon recommendations from the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) resolutions 55/1 of 16 March 2012, 56/4 of 15 March 2013, 57/9 of 21 March 2014, 58/11 of 17 March 2015 and 59/8 of 22 March 2016, and 60/4 of 17 March 2017, on enhancing international actions on these substances relating to sharing information on supply and demand reduction strategies.

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