

To: Members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections

**From: Kami Anderson, Executive Director,
Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc.**

Subject: Testimony for the Public Hearing on HB 1393 overdose deaths and fentanyl test strips

Date: Friday, November 5, 2021

Good morning, Representatives and members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections. My name is Kami Anderson, and I am the Executive Director of the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc., the Single County Authority for our three Counties.

In October 2021, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention released its latest provisional drug overdose death data which showed a record number of **99,106** overdose deaths in the 12-month period ending in March 2021. That is a **31%** increase from the prior 12-month period ending in March 2020. 63,075 of the drug overdose deaths were caused by Synthetic opioids (fentanyl and fentanyl analogs).

According to that same report, Pennsylvania is expected to see a nearly **17%** increase in overdose deaths during that period (12 months ending March 2020=**4,680**, and 12 months ending March 2021=**5,462**).

In Indiana County, there were 35 drug overdose deaths in 2020 and fentanyl was present in **89%** (31) of those fatalities and that trend has continued in 2021 with 14 of the 17 (**82%**) drug overdose deaths caused by fentanyl. Since 2016, Fentanyl has been the most prevalent drug found in drug overdose deaths in Indiana County.

Brandon Marshall, an associate professor of epidemiology at Brown University School of Public Health led a team of researchers and conducted a study in October 2018 to determine the impact of giving Fentanyl Test Strips to individuals that used drugs. "We found that fentanyl test strips are an effective harm reduction tool to prevent overdose," Marshall said. "Harm reduction is important because everyone deserves to be able to take care of themselves and make informed decisions about their health, whether they use drugs or not. These tests strips could be a life-saving intervention for many young adults who use drugs."

"The fentanyl test strips work like an over-the-counter pregnancy test," said Max Krieger, a research assistant in Marshall's lab and the lead author of the study. "Each single-use strip is dipped into water containing a bit of drug residue, and after a minute, either one or two red lines appear — one line means the liquid contains fentanyl, and two lines means the test did not detect the drug."

In this pilot study, the researchers provided test strips to 93 young adults who reported injecting opioids or using heroin, cocaine or prescription pills bought off the streets in the past month and taught them how to use the strips.

Each participant received 10 strips, which cost about \$1 each but aren't widely available. The study found that 77% of them used at least one test strip. Of the participants who used the strips, 12% used all 10 strips, and about half gave strips to friends. All participants also received overdose prevention education and a naloxone kit to take home.

"Half of the participants who used the strips detected fentanyl in their drug supply. Of those, 45% reported using smaller amounts, 42% proceeded more slowly when using, and 39% used with someone else present, who could call 911 or administer naloxone in the case of overdose. Some participants used multiple overdose-reducing strategies, and a few reported discarding fentanyl-laced drugs," Marshall said.

"Our study shows that the fentanyl test strips are effective at preventing overdoses," Krieger said. "A majority of our participants who received a positive result changed their drug-using behavior. The harm reduction concept behind these test strips, adding a cheap but effective layer of protection against known overdose risks, is similar to other health precautions such as using condoms to prevent sexually transmitted diseases."

Almost all of the participants (98%) — even those who didn't use a single strip — said they were confident in their ability to use the strips, and 95% wanted to continue using them.

The study also found that participants would feel most comfortable obtaining rapid-acting fentanyl test strips at health clinics and other community-based organizations. The authors suggest that "community-based organizations that conduct overdose prevention education and outreach efforts may be ideal venues for rapid fentanyl test strip training and distribution, as these organizations also distribute other harm reduction supplies."

While most individuals that test their drugs will not dispose of the drug because fentanyl is detected with a test strip, it has been shown to change the behavior of people that are using drugs and can lead to less overdose fatalities. This inexpensive tool can have a positive impact on individuals that use drugs and can save lives. If we can get people that use drugs to start making better and more informed decisions it is not unreasonable to think that we have an opportunity to engage them in treatment and the recovery process. This tool can save lives and can lead to people engaging in the recovery process.

I have included a copy of the Research Paper on the Brown University study previously mentioned.

I strongly support the passing of House Bill 1393.

Thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony to your Committee.

To: Members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections

**From: Mike Krafick, CRS Supervisor
Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission Inc.**

Subject: Testimony on the Public Hearing on HB 139 overdose deaths and fentanyl test strips

Date: January 10, 2022

Good morning, Representatives and members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections. My name is Mike Krafick, I'm a Certified Recovery Specialist (CRS) and the CRS Supervisor at the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission (AICDAC). I've been working at AICDAC for the past 12 years, providing recovery support services and supervising Certified Recovery Specialists in the 3 Counties that we serve. I am also a person in long-term recovery, for nearly 10 years I struggled with opioid addiction. In April of this year, I will celebrate 14 years of recovery. I went to treatment for the last time on April 24th, 2008.

Throughout my addiction I overdosed multiple times, saw friends of mine overdose and die, and did not believe at that time that I would survive my chaotic substance use. At that time, Naloxone was not widely available the way it is today. I am truly fortunate that the people I was with or the people that found me were willing to get me the medical attention that I needed. I went to treatment for the first time at age 22, after 2 years of using heroin and other opioids regularly my health insurance would only cover 10 days of inpatient treatment including detox. Over the next 6 years I was in and out of multiple treatment centers and continued to struggle.

Over the past several years I have spent more and more of my time and focus on improving access to harm reduction initiatives to people that use drugs. Harm Reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. When I think about harm reduction, the first thing that comes to mind for me is compassion and empathy, meeting people where they are at and giving them the resources to improve their health and wellness at their own pace. During my active addiction, I visited Prevention Point Pittsburgh and to this day I very specifically remember how I felt leaving that facility. I felt heard, I did not feel ashamed or stigmatized, and I knew that I was going to go back. For the first time, I was able to have an honest conversation with a professional about my drug use without the expectation that it was going to be behind me. I was given the physical tools to be safer with my use, but more importantly I was given knowledge and information about how to make sure I was doing things that I could do to be safer, to survive. I remember being given information about treatment and other recovery resources; at the time I wasn't ready for that but believe me a seed was planted.

There is another harm reduction tool that is available, it is inexpensive and effective, and most importantly it will save lives. Fentanyl Test Strips have been proven to be an effective tool to help people that use drugs make better and more informed decisions. Overdose numbers continue to rise across Pennsylvania and an overwhelming majority of those deaths are attributed to Fentanyl. A recently released study from "Families Against Fentanyl"

showed that Fentanyl Overdose is the number one cause of death among people aged 18 to 45, more than suicide, cancer, car accidents or covid-19. Fentanyl test strips can be a valuable tool to assist individuals that use drugs to know whether the drugs they are using are contaminated with Fentanyl. Fentanyl has been found in cocaine, methamphetamine, and counterfeit prescription pills. If people that use drugs have the ability to detect Fentanyl in the drugs they are using, they will have the ability to make smarter choices and more informed decisions. It is not realistic to think that everyone that detects Fentanyl in their drugs will dispose of them and not use the drugs, but I do believe, and it has been shown to change their behavior around their use. They may make sure they are not using alone or use less of the drug than they normally would, or make sure that someone they are with has Naloxone on hand. Drug overdose deaths are preventable deaths, tools such as Naloxone and other harm reduction efforts have proven that over the past several years. Fentanyl Test Strips can be another tool to help save more lives in Pennsylvania.

Several municipalities and law enforcement agencies across PA have determined that Fentanyl Test Strips are a valuable tool in combating opioid overdose deaths and therefore are declining to prosecute anyone for possession or distribution of Fentanyl Test Strips. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has determined that federal funds can be used to purchase Fentanyl Test Strips as a public health tool to combat the opioid epidemic. It is my hope that you will consider doing the same for everyone across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania so we can help get this resource to people that need it.