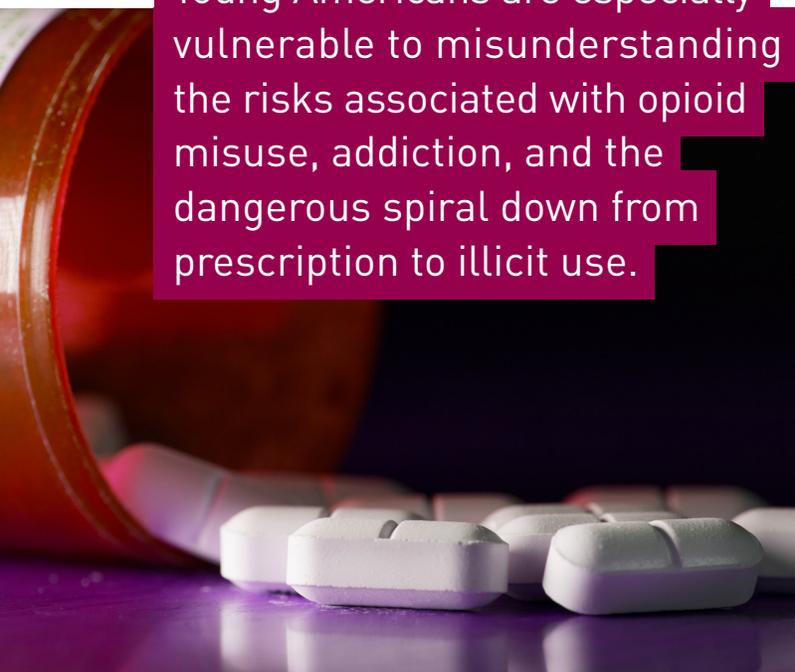


THE TRUTH ABOUT OPIOIDS

A **truth**® public education and prevention campaign is helping young people understand the dangers of opioid misuse

The Truth About Opioids, a nearly three-year-long effort from Truth Initiative to contribute its youth prevention and education expertise to combatting America's opioid misuse epidemic, is helping young people understand the facts about opioids, the risk of addiction and the crucial role they can play in solving the crisis within their communities. **Evaluations of the campaign show shifts in young people's knowledge and attitudes about the dangers of opioid misuse and around opioid use disease stigma, underscoring the importance of public education and prevention — alongside emergency response, treatment and recovery — in the comprehensive effort to combat the epidemic.**



Young Americans are especially vulnerable to misunderstanding the risks associated with opioid misuse, addiction, and the dangerous spiral down from prescription to illicit use.

Young Americans are especially vulnerable to misunderstanding the risks associated with opioid misuse, addiction, and the dangerous spiral down from prescription to illicit use. An estimated 1,300 young adults misused an opioid prescription for the first time each day in 2018 and overdose deaths in the U.S. continue to climb after reaching record numbers in 2019¹, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Truth Initiative began confronting this crisis in 2018 because of its record of success in tobacco prevention — the organization has prevented over 3 million youth and young adults from smoking since 2000¹ and helped bring the youth cigarette use rate down from 23% in 2000 to a historic low of 3.7% in 2019² — and the recognition and credibility of the **truth** brand, which has nearly 80% awareness among young people.

Truth Initiative developed *The Truth About Opioids* using its proven-successful tobacco prevention strategy — giving young people the facts and empowering them to make their own decisions — based on formative research and rigorous evaluation. Research that found a significant knowledge gap about opioids and their risks, as well as a desire among young people to be part of a solution, guided the campaign's focus on achieving **key outcomes: increasing awareness of the risk of misuse, decreasing stigma of addiction to help young people understand it can happen to them, and driving them to seek and share more information.** The campaign, which featured a series of different messages, was rigorously tested and the pre- and post-

market evaluations of different components of the campaign show that it is achieving these key outcomes among its target audience:

- > **Increasing opioid misuse awareness:** The campaign drove a 27% decrease in those who strongly agreed with the statement “If I got a prescription opioid from a doctor, I would share some with my friends.” **Nearly three-quarters (73.7%) of youth and young adults perceived using opioids without a prescription even once or twice as “high risk,” an increase from 66%.³**
- > **Decreasing stigma:** There was a **36% increase in those who strongly agreed that anyone can become addicted to prescription opioids⁴** and a **20.6% increase in the number of young people who said someone like them could become dependent on prescription opioids.⁵**
- > **Prompting intentions to seek and share information:** Young people were **600% more likely to search for the terms “opioid epidemic” and the campaign tagline, “know the truth” after seeing the campaign.** There was a 20.4% increase in those who reported intending to talk to a friend or loved one about their opioid use.⁶



Truth Initiative has plans to implement a next phase of *The Truth About Opioids* that will complement our work to date with a gain-framed message that will illustrate how everyone can be a part of the solution to end this crisis and eliminate the stigma associated with opioid use disorder and substance use disorder. This messaging strategy has been evaluated and is ready for implementation pending funding.

To read the full report that details the development, evaluation, and future of the campaign, visit truthinitiative.org/research-resources/substance-use/truth-about-opioids.

REFERENCES

- 1 Ahmad FB, Rossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts (2020). National Center for Health Statistics. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>.
- 2 According to an evaluation of *Know More* using an online continuous tracking survey of 15-24 year olds between May-August 2018
- 3 According to a peer-reviewed evaluation of in-market exposure to *Treatment Box* and *Know More* in Rhode Island
- 4 According to an evaluation of *Treatment Box* using an online continuous tracking survey of 15-24 year olds between September-December 2018
- 5 According to a peer-reviewed evaluation of in-market exposure to *Treatment Box* and *Know More* in Rhode Island
- 6 According to a peer-reviewed evaluation of pre-market testing of *Treatment Box* and *Know More* in Rhode Island



900 G Street, NW
Fourth Floor
Washington, DC 20001
202.454.5555

truthinitiative.org
[@truthinitiative](https://twitter.com/truthinitiative)

