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## Deaths from drugs, alcohol and suicide could hit 1.6M over the next decade, report says

Drugs, alcohol and suicide could lead to the deaths of more than 1.6 million people over the next 10 years, according to a report released Tuesday that signals a troubling trend in mental health in the U.S.

In 2015, there were 39.7 deaths per 100,000 U.S. residents due to drugs, alcohol and suicide compared with 23.1 in 1999 — a whopping increase of 72%. That number could go up to 56 deaths per 100,000 residents in 2025, said the report commissioned by the Trust for America's Health and the Well Being Trust.

Researchers from the Berkeley Research Group examined deaths from 1999-2015 using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New Mexico had the highest rate of drug, alcohol and suicide-related deaths in 2015: 77.4 per 100,000 residents. West Virginia was second with 67.4 deaths, though it saw the largest jump of all the states — more than three times the 22.1 it was in 1999.

Drug overdose fatalities in the U.S. more than doubled from 1999 to 2015, from 6.9 per 100,000 residents in 1999 to 16.3 per 100,000 residents in 2015. That number could shoot up to 28.4 deaths per 100,000 residents by 2025.

“We see a connection among the three epidemics,” said John Auerbach, president and CEO of the Trust for America's Health. “They are all behavioral health-related — that is, they have a substance abuse or mental health diagnosis associated with them.”

Alcohol-induced deaths, such as those that are a result of alcohol-related liver diseases or alcohol poisoning, increased by 47% from 7.0 to 10.3 per 100,000 residents. Suicides rose from 10.5 to 13.8 per 100,000 residents, an increase of 31%.

Deaths from addiction and suicide “are part of a larger malady that we're facing,” said Tom Hill, vice president of addiction and recovery at the National Council for Behavioral Health.

“Psychic pain drives a lot of this,” said Hill, who has been in recovery from drugs and alcohol for about 25 years. “Traumas and histories of trauma drive a lot of this.”



Despite the ominous predictions in the report, New Jersey-based addiction doctor and psychiatrist Indra Cidambi is optimistic. During the recession, she began to notice how the financial stress of unemployment led to chaotic lifestyles, frayed relationships and people who “just kind of gave up hope.”



“They didn’t have any purpose in life and wanted to numb the feeling,” said Cidambi, who is medical director of the Center for Network Therapy in Middlesex, N.J. “That leads to coping mechanisms and the safety network of using.

“I’m hoping now that once the economy picks up, we should see some change in the epidemic, and (people) are going to start feeling self-worth,” she said.

In 2016, 44.7 million Americans 18 or older experienced a mental health issue, more than 20 million over the age of 12 had a substance abuse disorder, and 8.2 million adults experienced both.

However, fewer than one in 10 people with substance use disorders and less than half with mental health issues received recommended treatment, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

The U.S. must further develop prescription training and education, implement a system of care that takes into account both physical and behavioral health and look at strategies that maximize well-being from a young age, Auerbach said.

“These conditions are complicated and require approaches that involve multiple sectors and multiple strategies. We need a comprehensive approach,” he said.

