

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Tri-Cities Fentanyl Listening Session

July 17th, 2023

Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: I think what's always interesting are some of the local statistics because each community is dealing with this in a different way.

And in looking at Benton, Franklin, and Yakima counties, we saw 15.6% increase in fatal overdoses related to fentanyl from 2020 to 2021. And I think that's why the community's been so aggressive on Narcan and so thank you for that because you've probably changed that statistic for this year. So, thank you for that.

This, you know, number of deaths and then really inexpensive access to fentanyl is what is really hurting us. It's just unbelievable.

And as somebody - this is our third forum that we've been having to gain data and information about what communities are doing and to try to work together in creating a state task force that helps in coalition with federal resources to truly try to fight this scourge.

We've been successful in the past in fighting both meth and opioids with new tools, but I feel like we keep cutting the head off the dragon only for it to come back bigger and more menacing.

And so now we have to really do everything we can to help local communities fight these fentanyl pills that are coming into the marketplace, sometimes as cheap as six cents a pill. And the crazy thing is people don't even know what they're taking.

So we've heard the crushing stories of mothers who've lost children just because they went away to college and didn't know what they were getting into. And next thing you know they've passed on.

We've heard from people in the community who have had their own mental health challenges and then were susceptible to this addiction only not to have the help and support.

Then we've seen little things, that I'm sure we're going to hear about again today, where a little bit of community support, a little bit of connection to "you can make it through this," is helping us pull people out of this addiction and into recovery.

So, we want to make sure that whatever we do, from a taskforce perspective, has a full complement of services and a robust way of dealing with it.

I definitely want to hear from law enforcement and our judicial community because they're the ones who are being overburdened by this. They're the ones who are trying to take it on, really dealing with it on the front end every day.

I don't know that we have anybody from our firefighter community here or our immediate response teams, but we've definitely heard [from them], as communities around the state are trying to coordinate their response.

You know, you have somebody who is the first responder there, oftentimes the firefighter, but in some cases, the police. And how do we get these people into a situation that is more productive than coming back in whatever it is, three weeks, six weeks, what have you.

And I definitely think that we're trying to think about how to streamline the services and get people into where they need to go and then obviously, do everything we can to stop the flow of the product into our communities in general.

The fact that the entire Central Washington [area] only has two providers who run HHS certified opioid treatment programs, OTPs. I think we need to think about that.

And we have heard around the state already about the antiquated policies of the Medicaid 16 Bed rule. So I'm sure I'll hear more about it again today, but how that limits us in getting people in to full treatment.

So as mentioned, we've been able to expand some of the community-based health and mental health that I think creates a more robust system. And I think that can help us, but we have a long, long way to go.

So I just want to thank you for being here and trying to help us come up with a really good effective task or strategy to help our communities fight back against fentanyl. So thank you so much.