

A new report on the opioid epidemic in New England published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston is co-authored by Joyce Manchester of Vermont's Joint Fiscal Office.

Vermont had the lowest overdose death rate among the New England states in 2017 following its bold action early on to address the crisis by giving as many residents as possible access to medication-assisted treatment options. The opioid epidemic remains rampant in New England, causing untimely deaths and limiting the number of productive workers. Analysis of relationships between opioid abuse and various economic indicators in New England counties over the last two decades suggests that an increase in the supply of (and access to) opioids is the most critical factor behind the crisis.

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Exploring Causes of and Responses to the Opioid Epidemic in New England

By Joyce Manchester and [Riley Sullivan](#)

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From 2015 through 2017, more than 10,000 New Englanders died from opioid overdoses. In 2017, every state in the region experienced an overdose-death rate that was greater than the national average. To better understand the factors behind the epidemic and the extent to which the crisis affects the region, this report investigates the relationships between opioid abuse and various economic indicators in New England counties over the last two decades.

The report's review of data generally supports the view that an increase in the supply of (and access to) opioids is the most critical factor behind the crisis. The New England counties that have the lowest rates of legal opioid prescribing are associated with the lowest rates of fatal overdoses. This is not to discount the importance of local economic conditions, but they do not seem to explain the variation in opioid abuse seen across the region.

The report also explores how the New England states are responding to the crisis. These responses include increasing education about alternative approaches to pain management, monitoring prescriptions, increasing access to recovery treatment, and enhancing criminal justice efforts to crack down on illicit opioid use.

<https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/new-england-public-policy-center-policy-report/2019/exploring-causes-of-and-responses-to-the-opioid-epidemic-in-new-england.aspx>