

# COAST

County Opioid Abuse Suppression Taskforce

## Addressing the Opioid Crisis

ISSUE 2. July 2021



### Interview with Sergeant John Hajducko



*The COAST Grant has enjoyed the collaboration of COAST Leads from agencies within Ventura County, including Public Health, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner's Office, Health Care Agency and Ventura County Sheriff's Office. This past May, Sergeant Matt Young, who worked with the COAST team since its inception, left for another position in the Sheriff's Office. Today we are talking with Sergeant John Hajducko, the new COAST Lead from the Ventura County Sheriff's Office, Pharmaceutical Crimes Unit.*

### What is your role within the VCSO?

**John:** I am currently assigned as the sergeant in charge of the Pharmaceutical Crimes Unit of the VCSO Narcotics Bureau. I supervise a team of detectives who are primarily tasked with the investigation of sales, possession and transportation of illegal or counterfeit pharmaceutical drugs and fentanyl. Our unit is also tasked with the investigation of all accidental drug overdoses that occur within the Sheriff's Office jurisdiction.

### How long have you been doing this work?

**John:** I have been assigned to my current role since May 2021, however I previously worked in a Narcotics as a detective from 2014 to 2018. I have been with the Sheriff's Office for 26 years. In addition to Narcotics, I have held assignments in the Jail, Patrol, Field Training Officer, Crime Suppression Unit, the Sheriff's Academy and SWAT.

### What do you believe the most meaningful work of the COAST Grant has been to date?

**John:** I believe it's education and really working to pull the opioid crisis out of the dark for the community. Unfortunately, not a lot of people truly know, or even want to know, the devastating effects that drugs have on the community. Many times the feeling is that "if it doesn't affect me, than why should I care." But the fact of that matter is that the crisis affects us all whether directly or indirectly, and it's not going away any time soon. From what I have seen so far, I think the COAST grant does a good job of bringing that "invisible" information from the drug overdoses and law enforcement activity behind the scenes, and converts it into searchable data and public education so that the entire community can realize just what a huge problem it is and that it does affect them in some way.

### What do you think residents of Ventura County need to know about the opioid crisis in our community?

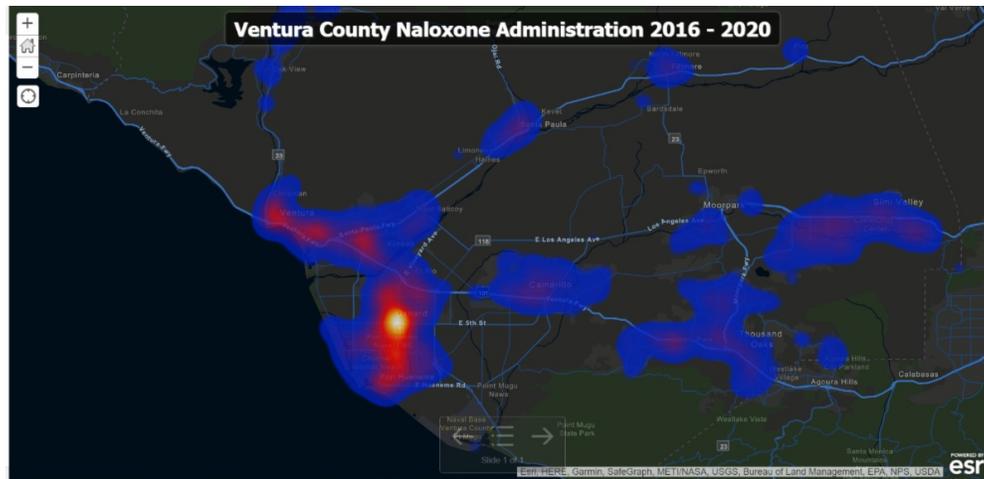
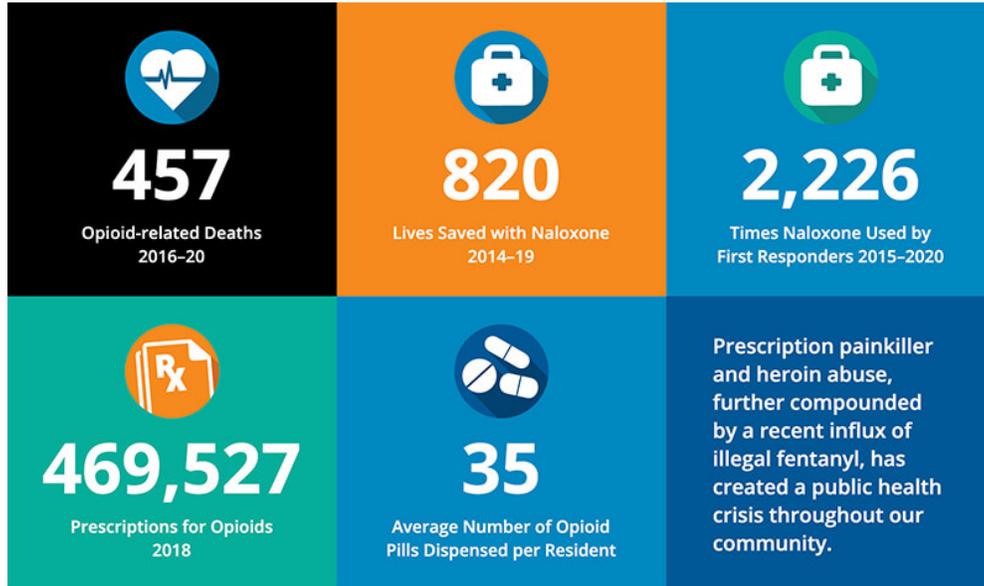
**John:** I think the most important thing to realize is there is not a one dimensional approach that is going to solve this issue. Law enforcement cannot arrest this problem away; the medical field doesn't have any medicine that is going to cure this; behavioral health cannot change everyone's thought process and understanding to turn everyone away from drugs; and families don't always have the support structure and communication skills in place in order to help their loved ones through an issue like this. The only way to get through this crisis is a community approach where all these entities cooperate and mutually support each other in their missions.

### Tell us something about you that helps us get to know you better?

**John:** My wife is a high school math teacher and we have a blended family of six kids, with the oldest at 20 and the youngest at five. Prior to joining the Sheriff's Office, I served in the U.S. Marine Corps. I'm an avid football and hockey fan, and my hobbies include camping, hiking, and motorcycle riding.



## Data Dashboard offers a Snapshot of the Opioid Epidemic in Ventura County



*By Brad Friday, COAST Implementation Coordinator*

The County Opioid Abuse Suppression Taskforce (COAST) was tasked with designing, constructing, and maintaining a dashboard which displays data for opioid-related overdoses, Naloxone Deployment, Law Enforcement and EMS response, and CURES pharmaceutical prescriptions data related to opioids and illicit drugs.



The intent of this dashboard is to provide COAST partners and County leadership a visual representation of data collected in response to the opioid crisis. This collaboration includes the Health Care Agency, Public Health, Ventura County Sheriff's Office, Medical Examiner's Office, Emergency Medical Services, and Behavioral Health. The COAST internal dashboard is nearing completion of Phase 1. Proof of concept was developed with the help of County IT/GIS and EvalCorp, and technical/design support was provided by ESRI support engineers. ESRI staff helped to assess our multiple fields of data to align the dashboard into a product that is concise, easy to navigate, and creatively designed.

Current tasks within the project include arranging CURES data into an efficient layer that displays the status of prescription drugs/opiates in the county, data requests to the Health Care Agency and Behavioral Health, and integrating overdose death data into visually compelling maps and charts that can help inform prevention strategies in a more focused direction.

**Learn more:**

Opioid Data Dashboard, COAST Ventura County

[www.coastventuracounty.org](http://www.coastventuracounty.org)

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## Interview with Erica Pachmann

*The COAST Grant has enjoyed the collaboration of COAST Leads from agencies within Ventura County, including Public Health, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner's Office, Health Care Agency and Ventura County Sheriff's Office. Today we are talking with Erica Pachmann, COAST Grant Action Researcher.*



### **Describe your role as the Action Researcher for the COAST Grant.**

**Erica:** I have a love/hate relationship with the term Action Researcher that was designated by the grant - love because it carries the connotation of "doing," "striving," and "moving things forward" and hate - because it brings images to mind of a superhero flying around in a cape. As the "Action Researcher" for the COAST Grant, I view my role as a facilitator and connector of the data that is required for the grant. My role requires me to: (1) engage with the various participating agencies; (2) identify extant data across agency partners; (3) address ways to enhance data sharing; and (4) track process and outcome metrics related to the grant activities. I view myself as a "thought partner" to the incredibly talented and driven

collaborators that are working together as a part of this grant to address the opioid crisis.

### **How did you become interested in research? What do you like about it?**

**Erica:** Ever since I can remember I have wanted to solve problems or figure out ways to make things more efficient and better for the end user. My passion lies in making the complex easy to understand so that information is accessible to multiple audiences. Useful decisions can only be made if the “so what” of the data are clearly outlined. As a consultant I get to solve problems and help support the work of forward-thinking individuals and organizations.

### **How were you involved in the development of the Coast Grant?**

**Erica:** I had the privilege of being at the table in crafting the COAST Grant and generating ideas for grant components that would be most supportive of the desired vision for the county. One of the integral parts of getting the grant was having an “action researcher” - so I fill that role/requirement. The primary focus of the COAST grant is collaboration among various county agencies to support enhanced data sharing. The grant required a neutral agent to support those efforts and track progress toward the identified outcomes.

### **What do you believe the greatest accomplishment of the Grant’s work has been to date?**

**Erica:** It’s hard to identify just one, so I’ll share three key accomplishments. First, the development of a centralized dashboard highlighting opioid related information across a variety of county partners, as it provides a holistic view of the county’s trends, needs, and available resources.

Second, the development of the Overdose Death Scene Training Video by the Medical Examiner’s Office, Ventura County Behavioral Health, Emergency Medical Services, Ventura County Fire, and the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office is a great example of agencies coming together to solve an issue. The training video was created to enhance the preservation of evidence at overdose death scenes to better allow the Medical Examiner to make accurate “cause of death” assessments.

A primary training outcome was that first responders were better able to understand each agency’s roles in handling death scenes. Each agency has different needs, and they really must coordinate to ensure that evidence is properly maintained for death determinations. The process also allowed for a feedback loop connecting first responders to the Medical Examiner’s office - which might not have happened without the training; and speaks to the collaborative nature of the county and benefits of this grant. Post surveys collected from law enforcement who completed the training indicate that the training content will help increase the coordination across first responders and the medical examiner office staff in these situations.

Third, we have been able to track prescription trend utilization data from the state's prescription drug monitoring program. This has also allowed us to better understand prescribing trends among prescriber specialties and identify areas for focused prevention and education.

**Tell us about your work prior to working with EVALCORP?**

**Erica:** Before my time at EVALCORP, I was finishing my graduate degree and worked as a consultant in organizational development and evaluation.

**Tell us something about you that helps us get to know you better?**

**Erica:** Growing up in a mixed culture household (German and Mexican) allowed me to see first-hand how disparate traditions, experiences, and environments shape perceptions and filter the way in which information is received. It highlighted at a young age the need for tailored and thoughtful communication to ensure information is received in the intended manner. I recently adopted a 2-year-old Husky/German Shepherd mix and I am smitten with my new hiking buddy.

*Thank you Erica for sharing your experience with us!*

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## Overdose Prevention Program Update

### Saving Lives in Ventura County

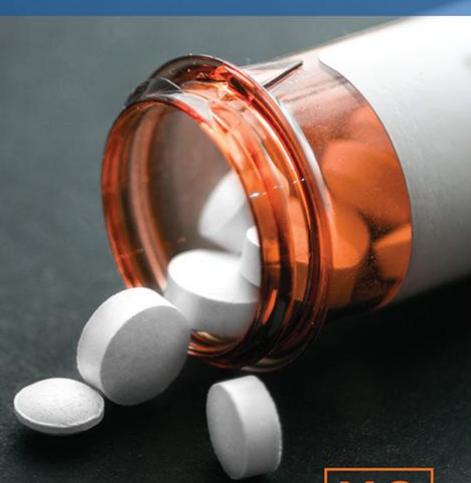
# OVERDOSE – could it happen to someone you care about?

If prescription pain medicines are misused, they could lead to an overdose.

And our local opioid epidemic has been worsened by a recent influx of illegal fentanyl, which is sometimes mixed in with other drugs, including heroin. Fentanyl is so strong that even a tiny amount can lead to overdose and death for people of any age.

**DID YOU KNOW**  
that you could save a life  
with a free Rescue Kit?

**CALL** 1-800-667-6663



LEARN MORE:  
[www.VenturaCountyResponds.org](http://www.VenturaCountyResponds.org)



**Overdoses are increasing.  
Fentanyl may be in any  
street drug.**

### Know the signs of overdose

- Breathing slowly or not at all
- Unresponsive
  - **Call 911 immediately**
  - **Give naloxone/Narcan®**



### Could someone you care about be at risk?

- Always carry naloxone/Narcan®
- Call for a free confidential rescue kit:  
1-805-667-6663



### Help for Addiction

Access Line: 1-844-385-9200  
Toll-free • Confidential • 24/7

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The Overdose Prevention Program began October 2014 as a pilot project out of the Ventura County Rx Abuse and Heroin Workgroup. The program has grown from a small pilot project to a program with 34 overdose prevention education and naloxone distribution sites.

The program was expanded to provide naloxone kits and training to all law enforcement agencies in Ventura County. An institutional program provides naloxone kits and training to 27 institutions throughout Ventura County, reaching individuals at a high risk of an opioid overdose.

In response to COVID-19, the overdose prevention program developed an online Opioid Overdose Response Training Course. The Overdose Prevention Program continues to grow and evolve to save lives in Ventura County.

The Medical Examiner's Office released its Special Report on 2020 fatal overdoses in late February 2021. The report reflected a 45.6% increase in overdose deaths in Ventura county in 2020. Fentanyl was a major contributor to the increase, is 50 to 100 times stronger than Morphine and can easily be mixed with other substances, such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and counterfeit pills. This makes opioid overdose a risk for all users of any illegal substance. In response to the growing fentanyl issue in Ventura County the overdose prevention program has expanded the qualifications for overdose rescue kits and replaced two doses of naloxone to three doses starting in June 2021.

The Overdose Prevention Programs' expanded efforts are made possible by the Department of Health Care Services, Naloxone Distribution Project. The Overdose Rescue kits include three doses of nasal Narcan, an instruction card in English and Spanish, rescue breathing shield, standing order card, and Fentanyl risk education card that includes a link to addiction treatment.

The Overdose Prevention Program has provided overdose prevention education and distributed over 5,200 rescue kits to Ventura County residents from its inception through May 2021, and over 1,200 lives have been saved.

The primary goal of the Overdose Prevention Program is to decrease fatal overdoses in our county by reversing the effects of an opioid overdose. The goal of saving lives is achieved through education and collaboration with agencies throughout Ventura County. The Overdose Prevention Program's success is largely due to our partner's participation in kit distribution, developing and implementing overdose education, and anti-stigma media campaigns. Most recently we partnered with Public Health and Gold Coast Transit on developing on fentanyl risk messaging, including resources on naloxone and treatment resources for the homeless population.

**Learn more:**  
Ventura County Responds  
[Preventing Overdose](#)



# Spotlight: Fentanyl & Fake Pills

## What You Need to Know



### FENTANYL

Fentanyl is an extremely powerful synthetic opioid, much stronger than other opioids like oxycodone, and is estimated to be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. All forms of fentanyl can be dangerous and it's important to know the differences.

- In its prescription form, fentanyl is used medically to treat severe or long-term pain in patients who need continuous relief.
- Prescription fentanyl is not usually linked to most synthetic opioid harms or overdoses.

However, fentanyl is also illegally manufactured and sold, and is one of the most common drugs associated with overdose deaths in the United States. In Ventura County, from 2019 to 2020 alone, fentanyl contributed significantly to a 45% increase in opioid-related fatal overdoses.

- In most cases, illegal fentanyl is made in Mexico, often supplied with ingredients from China, and the exact formula and potency are often unknown until it's too late.
- Some drug dealers mix fentanyl with other drugs such as heroin or cocaine, so people might snort, swallow, smoke, or inject it without knowing.
- Fentanyl analogs, such as carfentanil, are chemically related to fentanyl, and are often more toxic.
- Illegal fentanyl and its counterpart, fake pills, are fueling the epidemic of drug overdoses in the United States.

### FAKE PILLS

The illicit form of fentanyl is also sold in counterfeit or fake pills, which are disguised as other drugs, frequently as round, blue pills. The deception can be deadly if someone believes they are taking a harmless pill.

- One in four fake pills tested by DEA labs contained a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl.
- Fake pills are sold online and on apps that are popular with teens, who may believe they are buying something safe for anxiety or depression.
- Teens especially may believe that all medicine is safe and be unaware that the pill that appears safe is actually deadly.

Learn more:

[Ventura County Responds, Fentanyl & Fake Pills](#)

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## Helpful Resources

Ventura County Limits

[www.venturacountylimits.org](http://www.venturacountylimits.org)

Ventura County Responds

[venturacountyresponds.org](http://venturacountyresponds.org)

Opioid Data Dashboard, COAST Ventura County

[www.coastventuracounty.org](http://www.coastventuracounty.org)

Ventura County Behavioral Health

[vcbh.org](http://vcbh.org)

*Need Help?*

*If you or a family member are struggling with addiction, talk to your healthcare provider or call the confidential 24/7*

*Access Line: 1-844-385-9200.*

*> [Learn about Substance Use Treatment Services](#)*

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## About Us

### Supporting Health - Preventing Harm

Prevention Services works upstream to reduce alcohol and drug-related problems in our community. Initiatives are aimed at limiting harms related to impaired driving; underage and binge drinking; marijuana and vaping, especially as it relates to harms to youth; prescription drug abuse; and addressing health disparities among vulnerable populations.

A primary goal is to delay the onset of first use of alcohol and or other drugs by youth. We collaborate with schools, parent groups, government agencies, medical partners, law enforcement, community-based organizations and more.

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## Contact Us

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[www.VenturaCountyResponds.org](http://www.VenturaCountyResponds.org)