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Subject: Today in Science: Glimmer of hope in opioid epidemic

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# Today in Science

**August 8, 2024:** How stars go out, deaths from opioid overdoses decline, and Tim Walz's climate record.

—*Andrea Gawrylewski, Chief Newsletter Editor*

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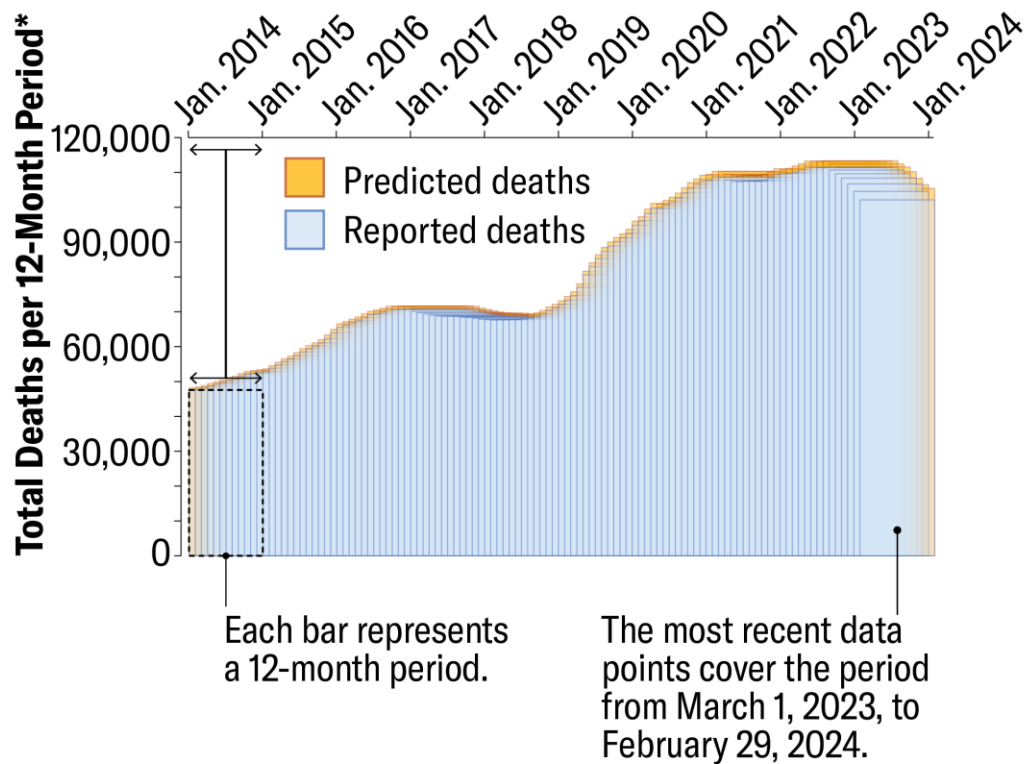
### An Encouraging Decline

Recent provisional data from the CDC show that drug overdose deaths have [declined slightly from their peak last year](#). Deaths are still incredibly high—more than 100,000 per year. A large proportion of these are from the synthetic opioid fentanyl, which is much more potent than other opioids. While overdoses have declined across much of the Eastern U.S., deaths in Western states have increased, suggesting the epidemic is still raging there. And deaths from cocaine and methamphetamine have increased.

**Possible explanations:** Overdose deaths increased dramatically during the COVID pandemic, possibly driven by isolation and lack of access to treatment such as the medications buprenorphine and methadone as well as the overdose reversal drug naloxone (Narcan). But as the pandemic has waned, more people may have been able to access help. The population of people using fentanyl may have also shrunk as more people have died, and reduced supply of opioids may have played a part.

**What the experts say:** “We’re still at the stage where more than 100,000 people are dying a year from overdoses, so the number is still unacceptably high,” says Magdalena Cerda, an epidemiologist and director of the Center for Opioid Epidemiology and Policy at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine. “But I am heartened by the persistent decline in overdose deaths in the past few months.” --*Tanya Lewis, senior health editor*

## Trends in U.S. Drug Overdose Deaths over the Past Decade



*\*Data are provisional and may be incomplete.*