



U.S. SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL WASHINGTON

Cantwell's Actions to Combat the Fentanyl Crisis

The fentanyl crisis has affected every state in the nation. In 2023, 112,000 Americans died from fatal overdoses – the largest number in history – and public health experts say that fentanyl is now responsible for the majority of drug deaths. While the country has long been coping with the opioid crisis, fentanyl poses a new and unique threat because it is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine.

Fentanyl has had particularly devastating impacts in Washington state. Although opioids have been a serious threat in the state for decades, the fentanyl crisis presents a unique danger – and presents new challenges in treatment and recovery -- because of how potent this drug is. Data updated in January 2024 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that the State of Washington experienced the single-highest increase among U.S. states in reported drug overdose deaths between September 2022 to September 2023, an increase of 38.27%.

Moreover, 1,760 of the 2,695 overdose deaths in Washington state in 2022 involved synthetic opioids like fentanyl. In King County, more than 1,000 people died from fatal fentanyl overdoses in 2023. Spokane County saw a 425% increase in fentanyl-related overdose deaths in from 2020 to 2022. Communities of all sizes statewide have seen similar impacts.

Sen. Cantwell has pursued multiple paths to addressing the fentanyl crisis, including holding a statewide listening tour to hear directly from people on the front lines of the fentanyl crisis; urging committees of jurisdiction to convene hearings and consider legislative solutions; voting for new laws to provide funding and tools to confront the crisis; and securing funding specifically for Washington state to respond to the crisis. A summary of Sen. Cantwell's actions follows.

Statewide Listening Tour

For the last year, Sen. Cantwell has been traveling across the State of Washington convening roundtable discussions with people on the front lines of the fentanyl crisis. At each stop, Sen. Cantwell has heard from local leaders, first responders, health care providers, and folks with lived experience of addiction. To ensure participants can speak candidly and comfortably, some of these roundtables have been closed to press; others were open to reporters.

Sen. Cantwell has visited the following communities across Washington state to discuss the fentanyl epidemic:

May 24, 2023: Sen. Cantwell held a closed-door roundtable to discuss fentanyl in [Pierce County](#).

June 5, 2023: Sen. Cantwell convened a closed-door fentanyl roundtable in [Everett](#). The discussion included Snohomish County Executive Director David Somers, who lost his brother to a fentanyl overdose earlier in the year. Sen. Cantwell held a media availability immediately after the discussion. [VIDEO](#)

July 17, 2023: Sen. Cantwell hosted an open-door fentanyl roundtable in [Tri-Cities](#). [AUDIO](#)

July 24, 2023: Sen. Cantwell convened an open-door fentanyl roundtable in [downtown Seattle](#). [PHOTOS](#)

July 31, 2023: Sen. Cantwell held an open-door fentanyl roundtable in [Spokane](#). [VIDEO](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

August 14, 2023: Sen. Cantwell hosted an open-door fentanyl roundtable in [Vancouver, WA](#). [VIDEO](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

August 17, 2023: Sen. Cantwell convened an open-door fentanyl roundtable in [Port Angeles](#). [VIDEO OF SEN. CANTWELL](#) | [VIDEO OF OTHER PARTICIPANTS](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

August 23, 2023: Sen. Cantwell delivered an address at the inaugural [National Tribal Opioid Summit](#)-- a gathering of approximately 900 tribal leaders, health care workers, and first responders from across the country – hosted by the Tulalip Tribe. [AUDIO](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

August 24, 2023: Sen. Cantwell held an open-door fentanyl roundtable in [Walla Walla](#). [VIDEO](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

August 25, 2023: Sen. Cantwell hosted an open-door fentanyl roundtable in [Yakima](#). [VIDEO](#)

February 16, 2024: Sen. Cantwell convened a roundtable discussion in [Longview](#). [VIDEO](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

Legislative Actions

May 23, 2024: the Senate Committee on Finance held a hearing on the fentanyl crisis. Dr. Caleb Banta-Green of the University of Washington, who developed the Health Engagement Hub model, an innovative approach that provides a one-stop shop where substance use disorder patients can receive near-immediate FDA-approved treatment (buprenorphine) and access primary care, harm reduction, and other social services without an appointment, testified about how the program has reduced fatal overdoses by 68%. Sen. Cantwell, joined by Sen. Bill Cassidy, introduced the Fatal

Overdose Reduction Act, a bipartisan bill that would expand the Washington-state-developed, low-barrier fentanyl treatment pilot program across the United States.

May 3, 2024: Sen. Cantwell joined Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) in sending [a letter](#) to the leaders of the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance requesting a committee hearing on expanding access to evidence-based addiction treatment, especially FDA-approved medication-assisted treatment, through public programs like Medicaid.

May 1, 2024: the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs [held a hearing](#) on Sen. Cantwell's [Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act](#). The senator originally introduced the bill in July 2023. The legislation would help tribal police departments hire and retain tribal law enforcement officers. The increase in tribal law enforcement would help combat fentanyl distribution and trafficking on reservations.

April 23, 2024: the Senate passed the [FEND Off Fentanyl Act](#) as part of a national defense package and the bill was signed into law the following day by President Biden. The bill, which Sen. Cantwell cosponsored, enhanced current law so U.S. government agencies can more effectively disrupt illicit opioid supply chains and penalize those facilitating the trafficking of fentanyl. It also declares international trafficking of fentanyl and the precursors used to make it a national emergency. The Senate previously passed the FEND Off Fentanyl Act in [July 2023](#) as part of the National Defense Authorization Act and again in [February 2024](#) as part of a broader national security package, but the legislation was not taken up by the House of Representatives.

March, 2024: the U.S. Senate passed a series of federal funding bills that allocated a combined [\\$1.69 billion](#) to combat fentanyl and other illicit drugs coming into the United States, including an additional \$385.2 million to increase security at U.S. ports of entry, to catch more illegal drugs like fentanyl before they make it across the border.

November 1, 2023: Sen. Cantwell [held a bipartisan briefing on the fentanyl crisis](#) with her colleagues on the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Briefers included officials from the Department of Homeland Security, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the Department of Commerce. Later in November, the Senator also [released a statement](#) on the Biden Administration's announcement of China's agreement to help stop fentanyl chemical precursors from reaching the U.S.

October 2, 2023: Sen. Cantwell [sent a letter](#) to the leaders of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs requesting that the committee hold an oversight hearing on how to address the fentanyl crisis in Indian Country. The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held the hearing, which included Lummi Tribe Chairman Anthony Hillaire on [November 8, 2023](#). The Chairman testified on how the crisis has affected his community and emphasized the need for more federal resources. On [December 6, 2023](#) the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a second hearing on the fentanyl

crisis in Indian Country with testimony from several federal officials, including Vanessa Waldref, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, and Glen Melville, Deputy Bureau Director at the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Justice Services and an enrolled member of the Makah Tribe who has a thirty-year career in bureau and tribal law enforcement.

May 15, 2023: Sen. Cantwell, chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, led a committee markup of S. 1280, [the TRANQ Research Act](#), to help combat the rise in illicit use of xylazine (also known as tranq). It directs the National Institute of Standards and Technology to take steps to enhance understanding of xylazine or tranq and other novel synthetic drugs, develop new tests for detection, and establish partnerships with front-line entities that are often the first points of contact with new street drugs. Sen. Cantwell is a cosponsor of that bipartisan bill, and also cosponsored similar bipartisan language to amend a bill that subsequently passed the Senate by unanimous consent in June. The TRANQ Research Act was passed by the House of Representatives on December 4, 2023, and [signed into law](#) by President Biden on December 19, 2023.

Federal Funding to Address the Crisis in WA

March 8, 2024: the Senator announced that the Yakama Nation had received a [\\$1.028 million](#) grant to launch the Yakama Nation Drug and Fentanyl Task Force to help curb the impact of fentanyl. The funding was included in the appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2024.

November 3, 2023: Sen. Cantwell announced [\\$5.9 million](#) in federal grants through the Department of Justice for Western Washington tribes, counties, and cities to help improve local responses to the fentanyl crisis. The grants will support programs that increase access to inpatient and outpatient treatment services, continuing education of emergency responders, and mental health service.

September 1, 2023: the Senator announced [\\$625,000 in funding](#) to prevent youth substance abuse in the state and over [\\$2 million](#) for addiction treatment and emergency overdose response programs in three rural western Washington communities. Another series of grants totaling nearly [\\$4 million](#) was announced in late September, expanding Certified Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) in four Washington communities. CCBHCs provide a myriad of mental health and substance use treatments, specifically for low-income patients. Sen. Cantwell [helped create and fund the CCBHC program](#).

August 25, 2023: Sen. Cantwell announced [\\$23 million in funding](#) for Washington communities and tribes, including the Yakama Nation and the Seattle Indian Health Board, to combat the fentanyl crisis and improve mental health care services.