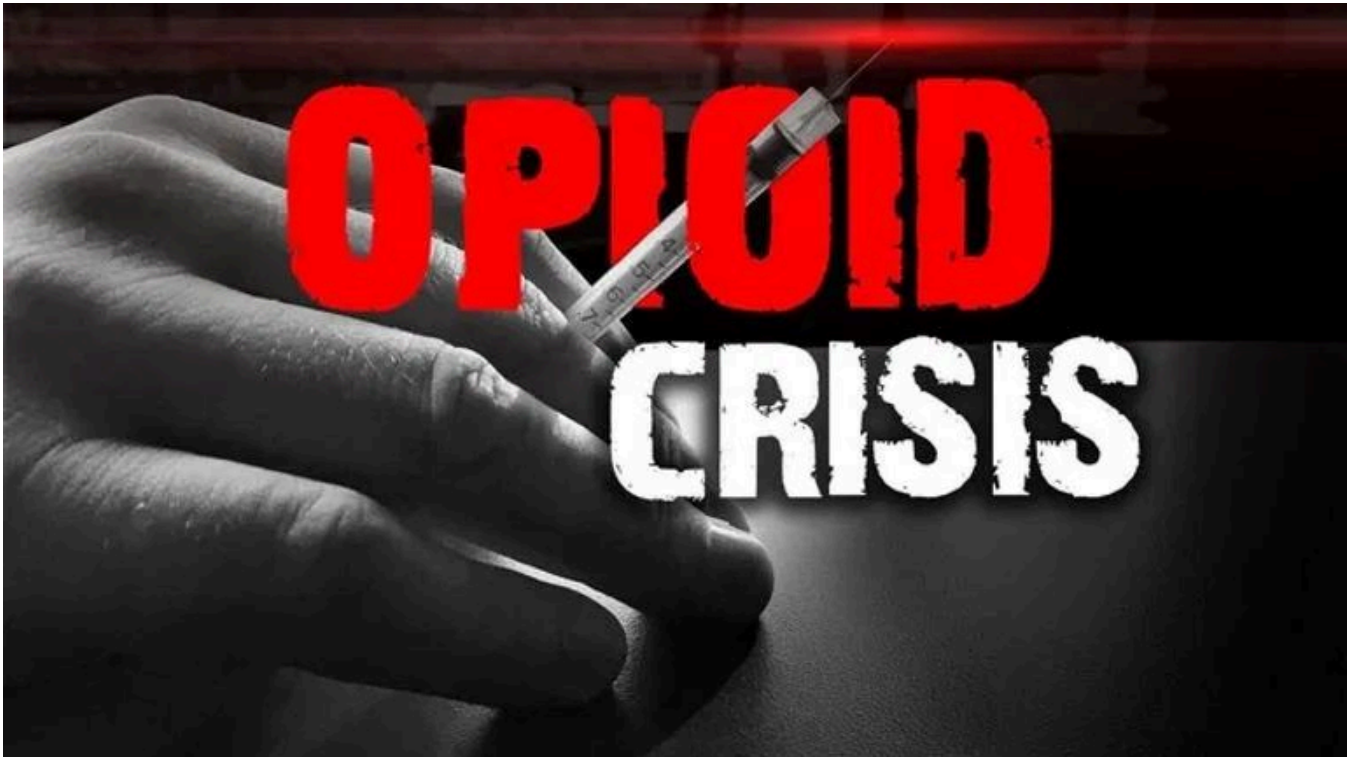


## Del Norte mired in Opioid crisis

October 2, 2023



Jacqueline Roberts delivered a sobering prescription drug report at the September 26th Board of Supervisors meeting. The assistant County counsel shared with the Board on-going litigation with major pharmaceutical companies in seeking financial relief from the deadly effects of prescription opioids including fentanyl which Roberts attributed to three- quarters of the deaths. Her comments were riveting. The opioid addiction crisis is a national, state and major local crisis.

In Del Norte County, Roberts reported that the explosion of opioid addiction increased 264 percent over the period 2019-2021.

How did Del Norte County arrive at this notorious status?

According to Roberts,

in 2021, 17,361 prescriptions were written in Del Norte, alone.

From February 2022-to January 2023, Del Norte County possessed the highest per capita death rate from opiate-related overdoses in California. 34 deaths were recorded from a population of 27,082. Del Norte's

lethality rate for opioids was 125.5 per 100,000. Lake County was second at 76.3 deaths per 100,000. San Francisco County ranked third on this sobering list.

16 deaths have occurred in Del Norte for 2023, so far.

Roberts lamented, “ Most shocking to me is the statistic Del Norte children age zero to five years old top this list of all 58 counties, based on per capita population.”

Where did this opioid problem originate?

Roberts points to manufacturers, distributors and retailers in creating this crisis.

What has Del Norte County done to combat this crisis?

With direction from the Board, the County brought suit against these opioid distributors in 2018. The County has joined 3400 plaintiff cities, counties, states, native tribes and special districts in a mega multi- billion dollar lawsuit heard in the U.S. District Court Northern District of Ohio.

In July of 2021, three distributors and one pharmaceutical agreed to a settlement of up to \$21 billion over 18 years. The manufacturer Johnson and Johnson agreed to pay out \$5 billion over nine years. From that initial settlement, Del Norte County has received over \$366,000.

Additional settlements on these defendants will be following in June and July, 2024. Additional settlements from other defendants will ensue.

Roberts requested direction from the Board in establishing a local working group to determine how these funds will be allocated.

Roberts underscored the significant role Del Norte County will play, not the State, on how these funds will be distributed. The possible uses of the settlement are varied and will be discussed at a later time.

Reaction from supervisors was subdued. After Roberts presentation, Supervisors Valerie Starkey and Dean Wilson shared their interest in developing a working group. By consensus the Board embraced the concept of the working group. Del Norte County has five years to decide how to utilize the settlement funds.