08.25.23

Cantwell Convenes Fentanyl Roundtable in Yakima

State of WA experienced biggest increase in drug overdose deaths in the U.S.; 43 people died from fentanyl-related overdoses in Yakima County in 2022

YAKIMA, WA – Today, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) heard from first responders, health care providers, law enforcement, and members of the community who have been personally impacted by fentanyl during a roundtable discussion in Yakima at Triumph Treatment Services.

Today's discussion marked Sen. Cantwell's ninth stop on an ongoing listening tour across Washington state to hear from people on the front lines of the fentanyl crisis. In May, Sen. Cantwell hosted a fentanyl crisis roundtable discussion in Pierce County followed by a second roundtable discussion in Snohomish County in June; last month, she convened a roundtable in the Tri-Cities, a roundtable in downtown Seattle and a roundtable in Spokane. This month, Sen. Cantwell has hosted roundtables in Vancouver, WA, and Port Angeles. Yesterday, she held a roundtable in Walla Walla.

"We want a federal response because this problem is just increasing out of control," said Sen. Cantwell. **"How do we get the community … the tools they need?"**

Data released earlier this year 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 from between March 2022 and March 2023, an increase of 25.39%.

Last year, 43 people died from fentanyl overdoses in Yakima County.

Sen. Cantwell noted that recently-passed legislation she co-sponsored, the FEND Off Fentanyl Act, may be able to help reduce fentanyl trafficking. The Senate passed the bill in July as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. The act would "**give DEA and Treasury the tools to go after the cartels and the drug suppliers, and anybody who's been involved in any aspect of the money laundering or financing of that,"** said Sen. Cantwell. **"We want a very aggressive response in cutting down on supply."**

Several participants at the roundtable also warned about the emergence of xylazine, also known as tranq, as a new dimension to the fentanyl crisis, an issue that attendees at prior roundtables have similarly raised. In May, Sen. Cantwell led a Commerce Committee markup of S. 1280, the TRANQ

Research Act, to help combat the rise in illicit use of xylazine. 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 last month.

According to the CDC, 105,224 people in the United States died of drug overdoses and drug poisonings in the 12-month period ending in March 2023 – a figure that the CDC projects will increase with additional reporting – and a staggering 67% of overdose deaths in 2022 involved synthetic opioids like fentanyl. In June, researchers at the University of Washington reported that in 2022, fentanyl was involved in 90% of opioid overdoses in Washington state and 65% of all overdose deaths.

Roundtable participants included Yakima City Manager Bob Harrison, Yakima County Sheriff Robert Udell, Yakima Fire Department Chief Aaron Markham, Yakama Nation Public Safety Commissioner James Shike, and representatives from Triumph Treatment Services, Yakima County Health District, Yakima Therapeutic/Drug Court, Safe Yakima Valley, Ideal Option, Comprehensive Healthcare, and three people with lived experience of fentanyl addiction.

Video from today's event is available **HERE**, audio **HERE**, photos **HERE**, and a transcript of Sen. Cantwell's remarks is available **HERE**.

<center>###</center>