

Hello, My name is John. I'm a former substance abuse counselor, I have a masters degree in criminology and criminal Justice and volunteered for years on a suicide prevention and substance abuse crisis line. These are all valuable learning experiences that provide me expertise to speak on this topic, but none that compare to my own experience with incarceration and heroin addiction. I have been in recovery for almost 17 years.

By the time I was 23 I had lost a year and half of my life in correctional facilities, which included my whole senior year. I didn't get to walk with my class, go to prom, any of the things most teens get to do. As an adult I went in and out of jail, for weed possession (while I had a medical marijuana card) and less than 1 gram of cocaine. I attempted to get clean multiple times when going to jail, but was unsuccessful until I went to my 3rd treatment center here in Portland.

The recovery community, loved ones of addicts and those that work in the treatment field got together in 2017 and rang the alarm bells about how drugs and alcohol were killing 5 Oregonians a day and Oregon ranked last in access to treatment. Most of those deaths were alcohol related. We were largely ignored and little action was taken despite our efforts. This was after we saw a 172% spike in fentanyl overdose deaths nationally from 2012 to 2016. This spike in fentanyl deaths was also ignored by politicians, people were silent. Heroin overdose deaths also increased as many shifted from Oxycontin to heroin as the government cracked down on Oxy and it became harder to find. People are 13x more likely to OD within 2 weeks after incarceration. If you need something for the criminal justice system to do in relation to this public health crisis, start diversion programs for property and person crimes, motivated by addiction, in every county in the State. Enforcement didn't help during the crack epidemic, the opioid epidemic and isn't gonna fix the problem now. We must focus on demand, which means prevention, keeping kids from turning to drugs, and help people get into recovery.

Purdue pharma largely kicked off the opioid crisis that we see today and it took almost 2 decades for the government to act after being complicit in the death of hundreds of thousands of people. Those who became addicted to painkillers like myself, became the scapegoat in the same way addicts are demonized today. In 2017 Heroin OD's started to decline as fentanyl began to flood the market, starting on the east coast, arriving here last. In 2020 Oregon drug deaths increased by 38% and alcohol related deaths by 73% before measure 110 was implemented. Even though Alcohol historically has killed more than all other drugs combined, you don't see efforts to criminalize alcohol. One, because we tried that already (prohibition) and it failed, and two, because alcohol use doesn't hold the same stigma.

Now because of measure 110, access to recovery and treatment services are drastically better, but far from complete. We still need more detox beds, residential beds (especially youth beds) and to bolster our workforce to satisfy the demand. The vast majority of counselors and mentors are in recovery themselves, so the more people we help get into recovery, the more people we will have to help others.

There are still people overdosing while waiting for beds, this is UNACCEPTABLE. My friend just recently OD'd waiting for detox, luckily she was revived. When someone says they want help, we should have help THAT DAY. If they aren't ready, we keep them alive until they are ready. If you talk to people in recovery from fentanyl addiction, you will see how common it is that they were revived with narcan and lived another day, eventually making it into recovery. Most people with a problem, both want help and don't want help at the same time. This is called Ambivalence. And like my personal experience shows, one hour I wanted help and the next I changed my mind. People can get trapped in that cycle for decades, or get clean for long periods of time and then fall back into that pattern. Addiction is powerful and insidious and anyone that doesn't understand that, should not be taken seriously on this subject. Addiction is suffering, with or without legal consequences. When I was working in treatment, most of my clients were self-referred or referred by employers, meaning they didn't have legal problems. Relationship issues, family discord, divorce, employment issues, financial issues, legal problems, homelessness, health problems, near death experiences, are all examples of what motivates people to go to treatment, but most of all, the dark cloud that engulfs an addict's life is why people want to stop. Sometimes people experience all the above and still struggle. Those people need the most love, because self-hatred and

disconnection is where addiction thrives. The stigma of addiction kills, yet the loudest voices lately, like PDX Real and People for Portland, fuel this stigma. Shame keeps people loaded.

I want to point out some of the misleading talking points used by the COALITION TO FIX AND IMPROVE BALLOT MEASURE 110 led by Max Williams and Kevin Barton. First, Williams says we haven't sent people to prison for drug possession for decades, this is deceptive and should not be considered a success. Prison is only for those sentenced to over a year, this would be outrageous if someone got over a year for drug possession. People still are incarcerated for possession, they either sit in pre-trial detention or are given shorter jail sentences. I was one of those people. I served 9 months total as an adult. I spent 6 months of that straight in jail waiting on trial, because I didn't have the money to bail out. I eventually plead to 2 possession charges and was sentenced to 20 days. Second is that the crackdown of pseudoephedrine helped with the meth epidemic. I did not, our rates of meth use are the worst they have ever been. This leaves out that the drug market will always innovate and evade regulations, this is how we got Fentanyl. The response to this crackdown was the flood of P2P meth that doesn't need pseudoephedrine. Third, less than 1% cited with a violation for possession of drugs sought help. This statistic is only helpful, when looking out how many sought help previously from the misdemeanor possession charge, it likely wasn't much higher. This is the insidiousness of addiction. According to Health and Human Services, in 2021, only 6% of those 12 or older with a substance use disorder receive any treatment. Lastly, the idea that measure 110 decriminalized drugs for youth. I believe this is incorrect, but either way, prohibition stopped none of the people addicted today when they were youth. I never once thought, "I shouldn't because it's illegal."

Other points made also need to be combatted. While public drug use is not ideal, people who focus on this, seem to care less about the addiction crisis and more about the discomfort of seeing it. They would be happy sweeping it under the rug. This is not a real solution. Seizing drugs, while I don't necessarily oppose it, is also not a solution. This will not impact the drug trade or availability, but could send addicts into taking desperate actions if all their drugs are taken from them. And the worst talking point repeated over and over again, by the uniformed, is "voluntary drug treatment isn't working." This is patently false. Most people who seek treatment are not criminal justice referred, and as you can see people are still seeking treatment after decriminalization, and there are still long wait lists. Do not take up beds with people who don't want it, while people are dying waiting.

While I disagree with step 12, Oregon Recovers 12 Step Plan is a good guide to help move us in the right direction. Increasing alcohol and cannabis tax can create a lot of revenue to help expand treatment. <https://oregonrecovers.org/events/12step-plan/>

Thanks
John