

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2021

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

[Maricopa County will get \\$80M in landmark opioid settlement \(azcentral.com\)](https://www.azcentral.com)

## 'Unspeakable human suffering': Maricopa County approves landmark national opioid settlement



*Maricopa County Attorney Allister Adel speaks during a news conference Wednesday in Phoenix regarding the approval of a national opioid settlement.*

PHOTOS BY MONIDA D. SPENCER/THE REPUBLIC

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Arizona Republic

USA TODAY NETWORK

Maricopa County has signed off, after more than seven years of litigating, on a national opioid settlement expected to infuse about \$80 million in relief money to county residents.

The funds are restricted, meaning they will go directly to relief and resources related to opioids, including to diversion programs to prevent people from going to prison for an addiction or substance-use disorder, county officials said Wednesday morning.

Throwing money at a problem won't just fix it, but it gets the community on a journey closer to healing from the devastation caused by opioids, Maricopa County Attorney Allister Adel said during a news briefing, surrounded by local individuals and families who have been adversely affected by the opioid crisis.

The overall settlement money to Arizona is about \$550 million, with about \$80 million going directly to Maricopa County, Adel said. A 48-page memorandum of understanding on how the funds will be distributed was approved earlier Wednesday by the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors.

The landmark global settlement agreement was with opioid manufacturer Johnson & Johnson and the "Big Three" drug distributors AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health, and McKesson.

Maricopa County was one of thousands of communities that sued, arguing that taxpayers and communities were forced to bear the costs of the opioid crisis while opioid manufacturers, distributors, and dispensers put profits ahead of health and safety.

"Maricopa County had its own lawsuit. Other counties had their lawsuits. Other cities had their lawsuits. Under the leadership of Allister Adel, we all came together to speak with one voice," said Thomas Liddy, head of the civil division of the Maricopa County Attorney's Office.

"That one voice of 15 counties was able to work with our attorney general and his staff and come up with the One Arizona plan. We're a few steps away from complete resolution but we're there,

we're going to get there," he said. "... The fourth-largest county in the United States has signed onto this settlement. Arizona is way out in front of this."

Unlike tobacco settlements in the 1990s, which allowed government agencies to spend money without restrictions, "to even fill potholes in the roads," the opioid settlement money secures funding to be directly correlated to opioid misuse, Adel said.

"This is a monumental day for our community," Adel said. "We'll hold accountable those who distributed this very dangerous narcotic and drug to our loved ones. But most importantly, it's going to provide resources to us."

Opioids have caused "unspeakable human suffering" in Maricopa County families and while no money can make it right, the financial cost to taxpayers can be corrected, Adel said.

"This money is going to be used for treatment, prevention, to help people recover from opioid use disorder and support governments and nonprofit programming, working to combat this issue," she said.

Kim Humphrey, CEO and executive director of Parents of Addicted Loved Ones, was in attendance at Wednesday's briefing to shed light on how the opioid crisis has hurt families. Both of his sons were affected.



"I see them standing out there and I say to myself, 'That is somebody's son, that is somebody's daughter, their parents are heartsick, probably don't know where they are, probably don't know what to do, just like we were,'" he said. "I don't see people ... as hopeless. I see hope in the fact that I know things can change."

Kim Humphrey  
*CEO and executive director of Parents of Addicted Loved Ones*

"We were, from my terms, an idealistic family having a wonderful life and all the sudden this disruption, this nightmare experience starts to happen," he said.

Humphrey said they did everything they could think of to help their older son, who was the first to misuse opioids. They took him to doctors and counselors, but their efforts were to no avail. Eventually, their younger son also began using drugs and following a similar path of homelessness and crime.

Humphrey, who was a commander at the Phoenix Police Department at the time, said previously when he saw people on drugs on the street, his first thought was that they should be arrested, but that watching his sons grapple with their addictions changed his mindset.

“I see them standing out there and I say to myself, ‘That is somebody’s son, that is somebody’s daughter, their parents are heartsick, probably don’t know where they are, probably don’t know what to do, just like we were,’” he said. “I don’t see people ... as hopeless. I see hope in the fact that I know things can change.”

Humphrey’s sons, 34-year-old Sean Humphrey and 30-year-old Andrew Humphrey, were in attendance Wednesday.



***Sean Humphrey, left, and Andrew Humphrey speak about their experience with opioid addiction and recovery at the news conference.***

The brothers said they went to great lengths to hide their addictions from their parents, especially given their father’s career in law enforcement.

Eventually, though, they were willing to accept help.

Andrew Humphrey said recovery has been a “blessing.” Sean Humphrey now works as a community liaison for Calvary Healing Center, using his experience to help others going through similar issues.

“As hopeless as it may seem at times, I just firmly believe recovery is possible for anyone,” he said.

Liddy emphasized that the settlement money is nowhere near enough to address the harm that opioids have inflicted in Arizona and Maricopa County.

The turning point in the case was when a federal judge in Ohio forced pharmaceutical companies to share all their data with the plaintiffs during discovery, Liddy said. He said he was "shocked, if not appalled" to see the data and learn how much pharmaceutical companies and opioid distributors knew.

"That was the game changer. From there on, each state was working toward a settlement," Liddy said. "These major distributors of opioids in America said to Arizona, we won't settle unless everybody is on board."

The One Arizona Settlement Memorandum of Understanding says 44% of all opioid settlement funds will go to the state and 56% will go to participating local governments. It calls for the state to publish on its website a report detailing the amount the state received in the prior year, as well as the allocation of any approved awards, listing the recipient, the amount awarded, the program to be funded, and disbursement terms.

Among other things, the One Arizona memorandum also says:

- The people of Arizona and Arizona communities have been harmed by the opioid epidemic, which was caused by entities within the pharmaceutical supply chain.
- Arizona and certain participating local governments are separately engaged in litigation seeking to hold the pharmaceutical supply chain participants accountable for the damage they caused.
- The state and participating local governments share a common desire to abate and alleviate the impacts of the pharmaceutical supply chain participants' misconduct throughout Arizona.

A report released earlier this year by the Maricopa County medical examiner shows that in 2020, the drug-related death rates in Arizona's most populated county rose by 32% to 46.2 deaths per 100,000 people. The drug-related deaths were fueled by opioids, including opioids illicitly made with fentanyl.

In 2018, an average of two people per day died of an opioid-related overdose in Arizona, state numbers show. In 2019, that number increased to nearly four people per day, or a total of 1,358 deaths.

Preliminary 2020 numbers from the state Health Department presented at the Arizona Drug Summit on Sept. 14, 2020, showed that opioid overdose deaths through the end of April 2020 were up by 38% when compared with the number of fatal opioid overdoses during the same time period in 2019.

Preliminary data shows opioid deaths have continued to accelerate during the pandemic. Health experts say there's a strong correlation between unemployment rates and substance-use disorders, and that isolation is another risk factor for substance abuse.

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