

# FDA Says Misinformation Is a Top Killer

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✓ Fact Checked

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › In the U.S., life expectancy is three to five years lower than that in other high-income countries
- › U.S. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Robert Califf stated it's the spread of misinformation that's killing Americans, as access to information online is causing people to make choices that are harming their health
- › Califf is calling for increased regulation, in the form of "specific authorities at FDA, FTC and other areas" to find misinformation and counter it
- › More than 250,000 patients die each year from medical errors, making it the third leading cause of death, but Califf didn't mention this
- › More Americans between the ages of 18 and 45 die from fentanyl overdose than any other cause, including suicide, motor vehicle accidents, COVID-19 and cancer – but Califf didn't mention this either

U.S. life expectancy is dropping, and if you ask U.S. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Robert Califf why, it's not due to ultraprocessed foods, inactivity, stress, exposure to environmental toxins or drug overdoses. Rather, it's the spread of misinformation that's killing Americans, he says, as access to information online is causing people to make choices that are harming their health.

"Why aren't we using medical products as effectively and efficiently as our peer countries? A lot of it has to do with choices that people make because of the things that

influenced their thinking,” Califf told CNBC.<sup>1</sup>

“You think about the impact of a single person reaching a billion people on the internet all over the world, we just weren’t prepared for that,” Califf said.<sup>2</sup> “We don’t have societal rules that are adjudicating it quite right, and I think it’s impacting our health in very detrimental ways.”

## **Misinformation Online Is Dropping US Life Expectancy?**

In the U.S., life expectancy is three to five years lower than that in other high-income countries.<sup>3</sup> In 2022, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also announced that life expectancy had dropped for two years in a row from 2020 to 2021, declining by nearly one year.<sup>4</sup>

“That decline — 77.0 to 76.1 years — took U.S. life expectancy at birth to its lowest level since 1996. The 0.9 year drop in life expectancy in 2021, along with a 1.8-year drop in 2020, was the biggest two-year decline in life expectancy since 1921-1923,” the CDC stated.<sup>5</sup>

It blamed COVID-19 for 74% of the decline from 2019 to 2020 and 50% of the decline from 2020 to 2021, but also stated 16% of the drop was due to accidents and unintentional injuries. Among unintentional injury deaths, drug overdose accounted for close to half.<sup>6</sup> Other contributors to declines in life expectancy, according to the CDC, include chronic diseases like heart disease, liver disease and cirrhosis, along with suicide.<sup>7</sup>

But Califf instead places primary blame for Americans’ declining health on that vague term “misinformation.” What’s more, he’s calling for increased regulation, in the form of “specific authorities at FDA, FTC and other areas” to find misinformation and counter it.<sup>8</sup>

“Califf described a public shift away from “truth” — at least as he sees it — as a bigger factor. He argued that online debate on issues related to health and medicine have led to people being “deluded” into gravitating toward ineffective or even dangerous advice,” American Watchdog reported.<sup>9</sup> It continued:<sup>10</sup>

*“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, skeptics of face mask mandates and the vaccines that were rushed through the research and development process were often dismissed or demonized as purveyors of medical misinformation.*

*In recent months, however, many of the concerns expressed by such skeptics have been revealed to be legitimate. Nevertheless, Califf seems to believe that those who do not toe the line of supposed experts should essentially be silenced.”*

## **Ventilators and Iatrogenesis Killed 30,000 in Early Pandemic**

Califf did suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic played a role in the declining life expectancy, but claims that COVID-19 is responsible are also questionable. What’s often overlooked, for one example, are the numbers of people who died due to COVID-19 treatments like ventilators and other iatrogenic causes, as well as those who died from other causes but were labeled as COVID-19 deaths nonetheless.

“We still don’t have especially good studies on the actual causes of excess deaths by state and country when the world first went into lockdown in spring 2020,” the Brownstone Institute reported. “For political reasons, these deaths were all generally been [sic] lumped together as ‘Covid deaths,’ but this coding was appallingly sloppy.”<sup>11</sup>

The Brownstone Institute conducted an analysis of all-cause excess death data from the CDC during April 2020 – peak lockdown timeframe – to determine actual causes of death. Medical practices were often to blame:<sup>12</sup>

*“This examination concludes that, contrary to popular belief, there was no uniquely deadly strain or variant emanating out of New York in spring 2020; this is clear from the fact that several states close to New York such as Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine experienced little to no excess deaths during that time period.*

*On the contrary, over 30,000 Americans appear to have been killed by mechanical ventilators or other forms of medical iatrogenesis throughout April*

*2020, primarily in the area around New York.”*

Conservatively, the analysis revealed that about 30,000 people in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts died due to mechanical ventilators and other medical iatrogenesis in April 2020. It’s also been suggested that 200,000 Americans died due to COVID-19 lockdowns and mandates.<sup>13</sup>

## **Medical Errors a Leading Cause of Death**

Why else are Americans dying years earlier than their counterparts in neighboring countries? In 2016, Johns Hopkins patient safety experts, led by Dr. Martin Makary, calculated that more than 250,000 patients died each year from medical errors, making it the third leading cause of death.<sup>14</sup>

In 2022, the World Health Organization announced that unsafe care by medical professionals and hospitals result in a "horrifying" 2.6 million deaths each year, worldwide, with at least 250,000 of those in the U.S.<sup>15</sup> And, in July 2022, the National Institutes of Health updated their library on medical errors, saying that number could be as high as 440,000 – and possibly even more because of lack of reporting – making it still the third leading cause of death.<sup>16</sup>

“The causes of harm vary widely: slips of the scalpel, lapses like mixing up lab results, faulty decision-making, inadequate training, evasion of known safety practices, miscommunication, equipment failures, and many more,” STAT News reported,<sup>17</sup> highlighting the case of Betsy Lehman, a reporter who died while being treated for breast cancer, when she was given four times the intended dose of a chemotherapy drug.<sup>18</sup> But Califf made no mention of the unacceptable number of people dying due to medical care itself.

## **FDA Commissioner Praises Risky Obesity Drugs**

Aside from the inherently patronizing assumption that Americans are blindly getting bad health advice online, to the extent that they’re dying prematurely as a result, Califf went

on to praise Novo Nordisk's risky obesity drug, semaglutide, known by the brand names Ozempic and Wegovy.

Putting his credibility further in question, he parroted the increasingly popular rhetoric<sup>19</sup> that medications are necessary to maintain a healthy weight, stating he has "great hope for this class of drugs ... that are dealing with the axis between our gut and our brain."<sup>20</sup>

"A lot of the things that we thought were willpower before, we're now coming to understand that our bellies are signaling our brain and vice versa, through endocrine pathways," he told CNBC.<sup>21</sup>

The long-term risks of semaglutide are unknown, but Califf downplayed potential risks, instead noting that he's waiting for results of outcome trials to see if the drugs lower heart disease and stroke risk in people with obesity. "If that pans out, we'll have some major decisions to make as a society," he said. "When do we add the drugs to the advice that we're giving to people in the general population?"<sup>22</sup>

It's ironic that Califf appears so in favor of the drugs, which have ties to cancer. The most commonly reported side effects are gastrointestinal in nature, including nausea and vomiting, but concerns of pancreatitis, pancreatic cancer and retinopathy complications, including hemorrhage and blindness, have been reported.<sup>23</sup>

The cancer risks are a red flag, with one patient in the Sustain 5 trial developing metastatic pancreatic carcinoma about 65 days post-treatment.<sup>24</sup> A pharmacovigilance study using the FDA Adverse Events Reporting System also looked into "increasing data on the potential risk of pancreatic carcinoma associated" with GLP-1Ras, including semaglutide, finding a clear association.<sup>25</sup>

"Based on this pharmacovigilance study, GLP-1RAs, except albiglutide, are associated with pancreatic carcinoma," the researchers noted, adding, "Based on the bibliometric investigation, cAMP/protein-kinase, Ca<sup>2+</sup> channel, endoplasmic-reticulum stress, and oxidative stress are potential pathogenesis of pancreatic carcinoma resulting from GLP-1RAs."<sup>26</sup>

Already, the drug carries a black box warning because rodent studies found semaglutide causes thyroid C-cell tumors “at clinically relevant exposures.”<sup>27</sup>

## **Overdose Deaths Skyrocket**

While pointing fingers at “misinformation,” Califf also neglected to mention that drug overdoses are a leading cause of injury-related death in the U.S.<sup>28</sup> A study by epidemiologist Chelsea Shover of the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine and colleagues reported that overdose deaths from synthetic opioids increased 10-fold in the U.S. from 2013 to 2018.<sup>29</sup>

And in certain areas, like St. Louis, drug overdoses have risen nearly 400% since 2015 in the Black community. “In 2020 and 2021, we lost over 400 Black men, over a two-year span,” Dr. Kanika Cunningham, a St. Louis family practice physician, told PBS. “We lost more people to overdoses than to COVID-19. This is a civil rights issue. It’s a human rights issue that we need to change. It’s a chronic disease. And we have stigmatized a chronic disease.”<sup>30</sup>

Further, according to an analysis of CDC data by Families Against Fentanyl (FAF), the drug killed more Americans between the ages of 18 and 45 than any other cause, including suicide, motor vehicle accidents, COVID-19 and cancer<sup>31</sup> — but Califf didn’t mention it, instead pointing the finger at misinformation.

Why might Califf be skirting the issues of medical errors and opioid overdose deaths — and praising a weight loss drug that may cause cancer — while suggesting misinformation is dragging down U.S. life expectancy?

Significant portions of regulatory agencies’ budgets come from the pharmaceutical industry that these agencies are supposed to regulate. Pharmaceutical industry fees account for 65% of the FDA’s budget,<sup>32</sup> and, at the FDA, 9 out of 10 of its former commissioners between 2006 and 2019 went on to work for pharmaceutical companies.<sup>33</sup>

So where is the “misinformation” coming from? Access to open discussion, multiple viewpoints and hearty debate is a cornerstone of a sovereign society, and the underpinning of free speech.

It’s urgent that we all take steps to remain free, sovereign individuals by protecting our access to information, which can be as straightforward as being guided by your own critical thinking and what your heart and soul know is right, and choosing bravery over obedience.<sup>34</sup>

Also, when weeding through information in your own life, it’s important to dig deep enough to unveil what’s real, and what’s, as in the case of Califf’s claims, real misinformation.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>14</sup> [Johns Hopkins Medicine May 3, 2016](#)
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