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## How COVID-19 Worsened America's Opioid Crisis

### Lockdowns Made Things Tough

Since the mid-1990s, over 500,000 deaths have been attributed to opioids. Many factors fueled the problem: corporate greed, economic recession, and changing attitudes toward pain treatments. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, which escalated the opioid crisis to untold levels.

Data released by the National Center for Health Statistics on July 14 show a large increase in overdose deaths. Between December 2019 and December 2020, more than 93,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. That's nearly 29.4% higher than the previous 12 months. This means that, on average, 255 Americans were dying from overdoses every day.

One of the most notable things about the opioid crisis during the pandemic is the increase in death by overdose throughout the country. States like West Virginia have always been at the center of the crisis, but states like California, Arizona, and Colorado have seen shocking increases in overdoses. Opioid-related deaths

have gone up for men and women of every race and age, and the numbers aren't slowing down.



The question still lingers — why have opioid deaths increased during the pandemic?

The first reason focuses on the lockdowns. Many people were furloughed or completely cut off from work. This led to isolation, which is unhealthy for most people. For those already using opioids, they had more free time to use and their habits only grew worse.

Then, hospitals became overloaded during the pandemic. Those already recovering from addiction found it more difficult to get medical treatment when the pandemic started. Most medical attention focused on COVID-19 patients, and many former opioid users fell to the wayside. The impact was even worse if they had lost their job — which led some people to return to old habits.

As the pandemic continues to rage on, the opioid crisis has not waned. It could take years for opioid use to level out. And that assumes it won't continue to increase.



## The Tables Have Turned

### My Experience as a Witness

For years now, I've been the one teaching my clients how to take the stand as a witness without angst. With any new situation, nerves are to be expected, and most people are not used to testifying in open court. I recently got the opportunity to experience this feeling firsthand as I had to prepare myself for questioning during a rather unique situation.

I've been the District Lay Leader for the 50 or so United Methodist Churches in the Austin area for nearly 10 years. In this position, I've done some things that are really fun and some that are really hard. Amongst the hardest things we do is close a church. But we recently had a mixed experience — we had to do the hard work of closing a church, but we are also using the property in an innovative way.

We partnered with a local nonprofit group, Foundation Communities, to create an affordable housing project. We'll transform the former church property into a beautiful 135-unit complex that provides much-needed affordable housing near downtown Austin. The project will mostly consist of two- and three-bedroom units that are specifically designed to provide affordable housing for families.

I've been working on this for about two years now, and we have jumped through all the hoops and climbed the necessary ladders



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to get the property re-zoned so we can begin the process. It looked like everything was going extremely well. Then, in late summer, the state notified us that they had made an error, and we may no longer be eligible to receive tax credits that they had promised, and those were important for the project's success.

It was then that my roles reversed, as I was called upon to be the witness and to testify at the state housing board to explain how excited we are for the project and how important the project will be.

I was hit with the same angst that many of my clients feel as I prepared to testify. So, I started doing the things I work with my clients to do. I went through all of my talking points and thought about some of the challenges I might face. The preparation helped clear some of the angst from the front of my mind. In September, I took my spot in the witness chair prepared to state our case. But it turned out that after I gave my presentation, no board members asked questions, so I was deprived of the full experience. But at least I have a better idea about much of the angst and concern so many of my clients go through.

But most importantly, they awarded us our funds. In my 10 years as the District Lay Leader, this has certainly been our most unique and vast project. A few other churches have done similar projects in Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, but ours will be the first for our community. I'm very excited and proud to be a part of that work and happy that I could learn a lesson (or a thousand) along the way.

*-C. Brooks Schuelke*



# Overcoming the Impossible Task

## Improving Your Mental Health One Step at a Time

Almost everyone at some point has encountered a task that is seemingly simple, but no matter what they do, they can't complete it. These tasks can be as straightforward as making the bed or something bigger, like cleaning an entire room. For many, this is an obstacle that they may want to do but can't, which weighs heavily on them and becomes detrimental to their mental health.

It's important to understand that the impossible task is not a sign of laziness; depression and anxiety can make any task feel much bigger and more difficult than it actually is. If you find yourself unable to do the things you need or want to do, try these techniques to help overcome your obstacles.

### Break up the task.

When the overarching task feels daunting, breaking it up into smaller segments can help you manage it. If you're cleaning the kitchen, clean for only a few minutes at a time before taking a break. It might take longer, but the space will be clean at the end of the day.

### Make the task more enjoyable.

Play music or involve your pet in some way to make the task fun or create a reward system for yourself. For example, tidying a specific



area of the house or folding a basket of laundry may earn you time to play video games or watch TV. Alternating tasks and rewards is a great way to overcome any task, big or small.

It can help to consider why the task feels so impossible, especially if you used to enjoy it. Try to remember what made it enjoyable and see if you can return to that state of mind. If the objective is not so urgent, determine its importance and if the task can be saved for another day.

When all else fails, you can always ask someone for support or even pay someone else to do the task for you. No matter what you decide, there are ways to defeat the impossible task.

# Thanksgiving Dinner for All

## How to Cook for Diabetics and Vegans on Turkey Day

Alongside family and football, food is often the highlight of Thanksgiving. But if you're cooking dinner for a large group, crafting the perfect menu can be difficult. Veganism and vegetarianism are more popular than ever, and it can be frustrating finding dishes that everyone can enjoy — or even eat at all, in the case of a diabetic friend or family member. Luckily, there are plenty of options to create an amazing meal for any group of diverse diners.

### Diabetics

Thanksgiving is a stressful time for anyone who monitors their blood sugar. Sweet potato casserole and sugar-packed pies can tempt even the most diet-conscious diabetic. But undereating can be as unhealthy

for diabetics as overeating, so it's important to include appetizers in your Thanksgiving menu. Healthy options include raw vegetables and hummus, roasted nuts, shrimp cocktail, or a cheeseboard.

For the main meal, turkey is fine if you hold off on any brown sugar or honey glaze. Green bean casserole is safe as well, and stuffing can be included as long as you use whole-grain bread. For dessert, parfaits made with Greek yogurt, fresh fruit, and sliced almonds are healthy and tasty and can round out the perfect meal.

### Vegans

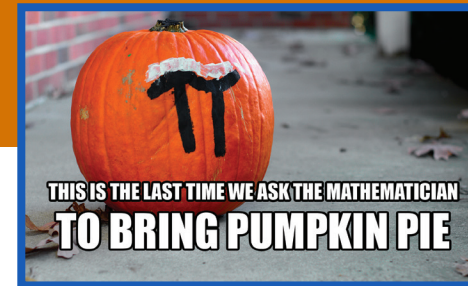
The best thing about cooking Thanksgiving for a vegan is that there are plenty of substitutes for classic dishes. Vegan turkeys are available at most grocery stores. It may not look like your traditional turkey since there are no bones, but it still cooks and tastes like a turkey. If a vegan turkey is out of the question, you can try making a mushroom Wellington or roasted cauliflower as a replacement.

For side dishes, vegan macaroni and cheese and roasted Brussels sprouts are easy and safe. As for dessert, most grocery stores carry a variety of gluten-free and vegan desserts at their bakery, such as nondairy ice cream and flourless cookies, that taste similar or identical to their gluten-filled, non-vegan counterparts.

The holidays are a great time to come together, and with these options, you can make everyone feel included in the celebration.



# TAKE A **BREAK**



# CAN YOU LEGALLY MOVE A STATE'S BORDER?

## THESE OREGON COUNTIES HOPE SO

Earlier this year, several counties in Eastern Oregon voted to break away from the Beaver State and join their next-door neighbor, Idaho.

Led by a grassroots organization called Citizens for Greater Idaho (or Greater Idaho, for short), this push to move the Oregon-Idaho border further west was fueled by an urban/rural and liberal/conservative divide within the state. In short, rural Oregonians, who are mostly conservative, don't feel like their state government, which leans liberal, represents their interests. However, rather than leave their homes and livelihoods behind for a government that better represents their values, they've decided they want to bring Idaho's values and government to them.

While the social and political dimensions of this movement are fascinating, the more pragmatic question of whether moving a state border is possible at all is an essential element to explore. What do legal experts say about the possibility of moving Oregon's state border? Well, proponents of the move shouldn't hold their breath.

While some counties have "voted" to leave Oregon, those votes don't hold any legal power. They're more like a poll, gauging interest in an idea before further action is taken. To make Greater Idaho a reality, however, both state legislatures and the United States Congress will have to approve the move. Idaho's state border is enshrined in its constitution, which means that in order for the borders to change, so would the state's founding document.

It's a tall bar to clear, but state borders have moved before. In 1998, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that much of Ellis Island actually belonged to New Jersey rather than New York. The mere legal possibility, plus the affirmation of some representatives in the Idaho state government, including Governor Brad Little, is enough for Greater Idaho to continue hoping that they'll have a say in the kind of government they want to have.



## EASY PUMPKIN BROWNIES

Inspired by TheCookieRookie.com

*If you have a hard time choosing between chocolate cake and pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving, this 2-for-1 treat will knock your socks off.*

### Ingredients

- 1 box brownie mix, plus other ingredients listed on box
- 1/2 can pumpkin purée
- 6 oz cream cheese, softened
- 3 tbsp sugar
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips
- 1 tbsp pumpkin pie spice

### Directions

- Preheat the oven as directed on the brownie box, then make the brownie mix. Fold in chocolate chips.
- In a medium bowl, combine pumpkin purée, cream cheese, sugar, and pumpkin pie spice.
- Choose your pan as directed on the brownie box. Grease it if needed.
- Pour half of the brownie mix into the pan and spread evenly.
- Add the pumpkin mixture to the pan, evenly or in a pattern. Cover with the rest of the brownie mix and spread evenly.
- Bake as directed on the brownie box, adding 10 minutes to account for the pumpkin. Test for doneness, and when your toothpick comes out clean, cool and enjoy!