Annual deaths by substance — legal vs. illegal

Tobacco

8,000,000

Alcohol

3,000,000

Processed meat

34,000

All illicit drugs

585,000

Opioids (fentanyl era)

120,000

Cannabis

0

Psilocybin

0

LSD

0

Sources: WHO Global Health Estimates 2021; UNODC World Drug Report 2023; GBD 2019; CDC WONDER

Side by side

Same category. Different rules.

Tobacco

8M

deaths per year. Legal in every country. Advertised for decades. Group 1 carcinogen. No scheduling. No prison time. Available at every petrol station on Earth.

vs

Cannabis

0

deaths per year. Zero recorded fatal overdoses in human history. Schedule I in the United States. "No accepted medical use." Millions imprisoned. Careers destroyed. Families separated.

Alcohol

3M

deaths per year. Causes liver disease, cancer, heart disease, fetal alcohol syndrome, domestic violence. Legal everywhere. Prohibition tried once — lasted 13 years, created the Mafia.

vs

Psilocybin

0

deaths per year. FDA breakthrough therapy designation for depression. Therapeutic index wider than aspirin. Schedule I. "High potential for abuse." Used in ceremony for 7,000+ years.

OxyContin (Purdue)

$13B

profit for the Sackler family. 500,000+ Americans dead from opioid overdoses since 1999. Purdue told doctors addiction risk was "less than 1%." They knew it was false. No Sackler went to prison.

vs

GHB (generic)

$0

available to you. The only sleep aid producing real restorative sleep. Schedule I — "no medical use." Unless Jazz Pharmaceuticals sells it as Xyrem for $100K/year (Schedule III). Same molecule. Different schedule. Different price. Different freedom.

"But it's stronger now"

This is the first thing people say. It's the escape hatch. If the drugs are different now, you don't have to think about why they were banned. So let's close the hatch.

Yes, some drugs are more potent now. That is a consequence of prohibition, not a justification for it. When you criminalise a substance, you push production underground. Underground producers optimise for potency-per-gram because smaller volumes are easier to smuggle. This is called the **Iron Law of Prohibition** (Richard Cowan, 1986): "the harder the enforcement, the harder the drugs." It's why alcohol prohibition produced bathtub gin instead of beer. It's why the opioid crisis produces fentanyl instead of opium tea.

Cannabis THC content has increased from ~4% (1990s) to ~15-25% (2020s). But in legal markets (Colorado, Canada), consumers can choose exact potency — 5mg edibles, low-THC flower, CBD-dominant strains. Regulation gives people information. Prohibition gives people whatever the dealer has.

Alcohol is available at 4% (beer), 13% (wine), and 40% (spirits). Nobody argues we should ban all three because vodka exists.

The question is not "is it stronger?" The question is: **does criminalising it make it safer?** After 110 years, the answer is no.

Sources: Cowan R, "How the Narcs Created Crack," National Review, 1986; ElSohly MA et al., Biological Psychiatry, 2016; Thornton M, "The Economics of Prohibition," 1991; EMCDDA European Drug Report, 2023

The Exhibits

These are not conspiracy theories. These are cited, verifiable facts that are extraordinarily difficult to find unless you already know what to look for. Page two of Google. Where nobody clicks.

Jazz Pharmaceuticals & GHB

GHB is the only known sleep aid that produces genuine restorative slow-wave sleep. Every other prescription sleep aid (benzodiazepines, Z-drugs like Ambien) induces unconsciousness, not sleep. They suppress slow-wave activity. GHB enhances it.

GHB is Schedule I — "no accepted medical use, high potential for abuse." Except Jazz Pharmaceuticals sells the exact same molecule as Xyrem (sodium oxybate) for narcolepsy at **~$100,000 per year**. Xyrem is Schedule III.

The same molecule. Schedule I if you make it. Schedule III if Jazz sells it. Jazz has spent millions lobbying to maintain GHB's Schedule I status — because if GHB were rescheduled, generics could compete, and their monopoly would collapse.

Sources: FDA Orange Book (Xyrem NDA 021196); Jazz Pharmaceuticals SEC filings; US DOJ scheduling determinations; TGA Poisons Standard; OpenSecrets.org lobbying database

The Sugar Conspiracy

In 1967, the Sugar Research Foundation paid three Harvard scientists — including D. Mark Hegsted — $6,500 (~$50,000 today) to publish a review in the New England Journal of Medicine that downplayed sugar's role in heart disease and blamed saturated fat instead. The review shaped US dietary guidelines for 50 years.

The documents were discovered in 2016 by Cristin Kearns at UCSF, buried in archives. The Foundation set the conclusion in advance. John Yudkin, who blamed sugar in "Pure, White and Deadly" (1972), had his career systematically destroyed by industry-funded researchers. He was right.

Sources: Kearns CE, Schmidt LA, Glantz SA. JAMA Internal Medicine, 2016; UCSF Industry Documents Library; Keys A, Seven Countries Study, 1958; Yudkin J, 1972

Processed Meat & The Mushroom Test

In 2015, the IARC classified processed meat as a **Group 1 carcinogen** — the same category as tobacco and asbestos. Not "probably causes cancer." Causes cancer.

Cigarettes carry graphic warnings. You cannot advertise tobacco near schools. Bacon is in the deli section next to children's lunchboxes. No warning. Same category.

We do not tolerate fast murder. We subsidise slow murder and put it on special at Woolworths.

Sources: IARC Monograph Vol 114, 2015; WHO Q&A, October 2015; GBD 2019 diet-attributable mortality estimates

Portugal — The Control Group

In 2001, Portugal decriminalised personal use of all drugs. Users are referred to panels of social workers and psychologists instead of courts.

Results after 25 years: drug-induced deaths **dropped 80%**. HIV infections among people who inject drugs fell from 1,016 (2001) to 18 (2017). Drug use rates remained stable.

Portugal is the control group. Every country that continues criminalising drug users is choosing the policy that produces more death — with full knowledge that an alternative exists and works.

Sources: EMCDDA Portugal Country Drug Report, 2023; Hughes CE & Stevens A, British Journal of Criminology, 2010; Transform Drug Policy Foundation, 2021

The Companies That Fund the War Are the Ones Selling the Drugs

Purdue Pharma made $35 billion from OxyContin — and was a top donor to anti-drug campaigns. Insys Therapeutics spent $500,000 to kill Arizona's cannabis legalisation initiative, then received DEA approval for synthetic cannabis 5 months later.

In Australia, 64 cents of every drug policy dollar goes to police. 1.6 cents goes to harm reduction. The Pharmacy Guild donated $770,000 to politicians in a single year. The alcohol lobby gave $5.2 million in an election year. Every Labor and Coalition senator voted against cannabis legalisation (24–13).

Six Australians die from drugs every day. 1.2 million supervised injections at the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre — zero deaths over 21 years. There is still only one facility in the entire state of New South Wales.

Sources: AIHW National Drug Strategy Household Survey; Ritter Report on drug spending allocation; NSW MSIC Annual Reports; AEC political donations disclosures; Insys SEC filings