

Brian A. Michael
Executive Director
LMA HIDTA
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Center for Rural Pennsylvania

LIBERTY MID-ATLANTIC HIDTA

The twelve-county Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA (LMA HIDTA) is located within the seventh largest metropolitan area in the United States, comprising six million people. Approximately 100 million additional people live within a one-day drive of the Philadelphia metropolitan area, a key drug transshipment zone along the Interstate 95 Northeast Corridor.

The LMA HIDTA has 31 separate law enforcement initiatives (Task Forces) with over 90 participating agencies that share intelligence and information targeting street level narcotics dealers to international smuggling cartels; violent criminal organizations trafficking guns and drugs; Federal, state and local fugitives; sophisticated money laundering organizations; freight and parcel interdiction; and cyber enabled criminal organizations distributing narcotics and concealing their activities through encrypted apps and cryptocurrencies.

The LMA HIDTA has increased its focus on evidence-based substance use prevention with the addition of a Prevention Coordinator for the region; and continued support of the National HIDTA Overdose Response Strategy (ORS), pairing a Public Health Analyst funded by the CDC Foundation with a HIDTA funded Drug Intelligence Officer in each state within the AOR.

THE NARCOTICS LANDSCAPE

Supplied primarily by Mexican and Dominican drug trafficking organizations linked to larger domestic and international criminal groups, the LMA HIDTA faces a multi-dimensional drug trafficking environment. Wholesale and retail quantities of illicit synthetic drugs are available to local users as well as to distribution organizations operating throughout the Mid-Atlantic region and beyond. While the LMA HIDTA continues to experience a significant opioid epidemic, it is also plagued by steady cocaine use, steady marijuana availability and use, growing methamphetamine supply and use, and persistent violent crime – creating a dynamic drug threat landscape.

Fentanyl remains the greatest drug threat to the LMA HIDTA area as the availability of fentanyl in a variety of forms continues to rise at alarming rates. While the presence of drug samples containing only heroin is rare (most often found with fentanyl), heroin remains available. Heroin detections in postmortem toxicology continue to fall. The presence of fentanyl in overdose deaths remains high and continues to be found in combination with xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer, and other substances.

Counterfeit pills are increasingly found to contain fentanyl and/or fentanyl-related substances, supplied largely by Mexican cartels and via local pill-pressing operations. Increasingly, the presence of nitazenes, medetomidine, and other analogs will continue to threaten the LMA HIDTA counties' drug supply due to the potency and lack of routine testing.

Cocaine remains a significant threat to LMA HIDTA counties with a continuing rise in reporting. Availability continues to be reported at record-high levels. Toxicology results remain steady and continue to show cocaine/opioid co-abuse.

Methamphetamine supply continues to increase, driving unprecedented usage and availability and decreasing costs significantly among LMA HIDTA communities, with a growing presence in polydrug samples.

HOW DOES IT GET HERE

The most common methods used by DTOs to transport drugs into, and US currency out of the LMA HIDTA are privately owned or rented commercial vehicles and passenger vehicles equipped with concealed compartments. Increasingly, LMA HIDTA initiatives have interdicted narcotics and currency in US Postal Service shipments and all of the commercial delivery services. In fact, one LMA HIDTA initiative that focuses primarily on this trafficking methodology seized over 360,000 dosage unit equivalents of Fentanyl in 2023.

OUTLOOK

While preliminary reporting indicates we may have reached the peak in overdose deaths, there is no victory lap in sight. Far too many Pennsylvanians continue to struggle and die from substance use disorder. Mexican based cartels continue to evolve and improve their production and distribution of synthetic based narcotics, generating millions of dollars. Much of their proceeds are now laundered via sophisticated Trade Based Money Laundering schemes and Chinese Money Laundering Organizations. A host of open and encrypted Apps, Darknet Marketplaces, and cryptocurrencies have fundamentally changed traditional law enforcement methodologies.