

Public Health Policy:

Americans are increasingly aware of the importance of public health. Whether we are talking about how best to respond to the [Covid-19 pandemic](#), how to prevent suicide [among returning veterans](#), or how to respond to [a lingering opioid crisis](#), public health policy and community-based initiatives have the potential to help Americans live longer, happier, and healthier lives.

Regardless of your race, socio-economic background, or gender, there are a number of public health initiatives that I believe will directly improve communities across America by making them more inclusive, prosperous, and safe - for everyone. But before we get into any solution, we first need to take a hard look at the problems:

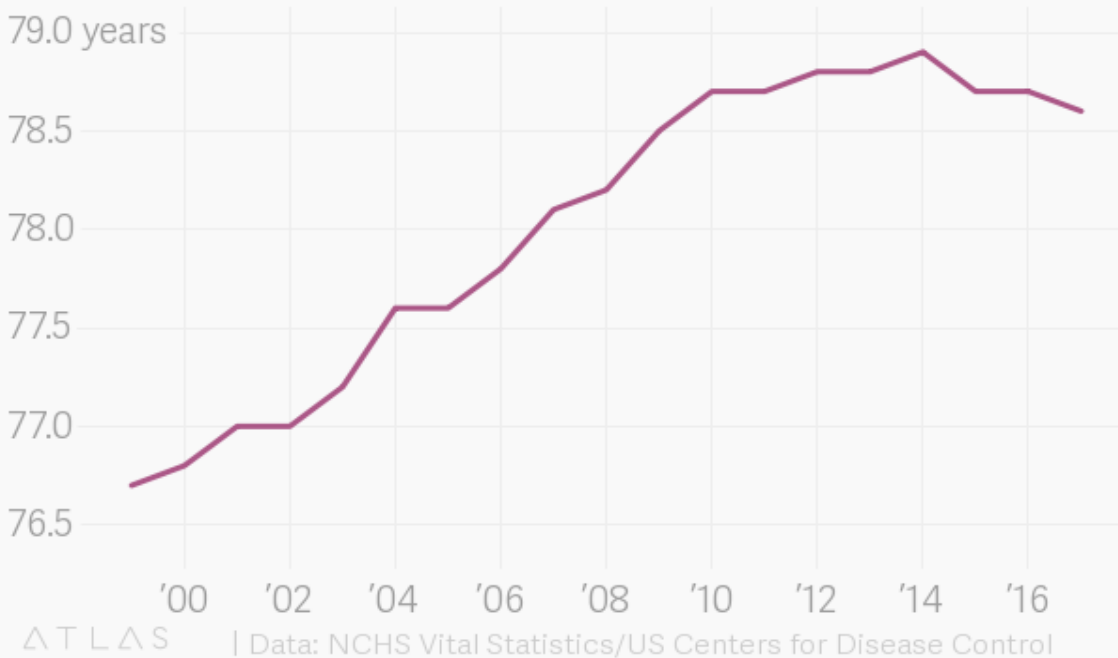
Public Health is Being Overlooked By Self-Interested Politicians and Lobbyists: The Cost Is Our Health and Our Children's Future

Omaha was the home of the largest copper smelter in the country for [100 years](#) and the largest white lead smelter in the country for 20 years. Operating without oversight or regulation, these industries allowed lead to fall from Omaha's skies for 130 years and contaminate the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the lawns our children play on. While over [100](#) companies contributed to this crisis, the main culprit was ASARCO who dumped [8,000 pounds of lead](#) into the Missouri River each year. In response to this very crisis, the Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance was founded in 2006, and I was hired as executive director to address lead contamination and environmental hazards plaguing the community.

Here's what I have learned from managing this disaster for the last 12 years: This environmental and public health disaster has disproportionately affected the African American community in North Omaha, while also costing taxpayers millions of dollars. In 2000, [10.5%](#) of children tested positive for lead poisoning. Today, North Omaha is the EPA's largest superfund site and more than [\\$150 million](#) has been spent trying to clean up the damage. Even though progress has been made, the EPA is now questioning whether it went far enough when identifying the "[safe](#)" levels of lead in the soil. As the above example demonstrates, Omaha is a case study for a much broader issue facing our nation: reckless, unchecked corporations are inflicting public health crises on the American people while raking in record profits for themselves.

On a national level, up until the coronavirus shutdown, our country witnessed rising GDP and corporate profits, as our nation's [life expectancy](#) went down due to record rates in [suicides and drug overdoses](#). Fueled by the pharmaceutical industries' widespread [over-prescription of drugs](#), over [130 people](#) now die every day from opioid-related drug overdoses, across the country.

Life expectancy in the US has been falling since 2014



On top of these numerous public health challenges, gun violence and gun-related deaths have continued to increase with the average American [being 25 times more likely to be killed in a gun homicide](#), as compared to other “high income” countries. This is in spite of the fact [that 97% of Americans support common sense gun legislation](#), such as universal background checks. Not only does gun violence [take a psychological toll on families across the United States](#), but it is also highly disruptive for communities, students, and teachers.

Finally, mental health problems and domestic violence is on the rise across the country, with [6 out of 10](#) Americans having sought out mental health help for themselves or a loved one. From my time working as a director of a domestic violence shelter, I saw firsthand that these issues have long lasting effects that directly influence the social and economic fabrics of our community. In Douglas County alone, domestic violence-related arrests increased by [49% from 2015-2017](#), while it is estimated that [1 in 4 Women and 1 in 7 Men](#) experience severe physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their life.

What all of this data tells us is that Americans around the country were hurting, since even before the Covid-19 pandemic. I think it's time someone listened.

What Needs to be Done? Public Health Solutions That Put People First

I believe that any public health policy needs to focus on putting people first and holding corporations that generate profits at the expense of human lives accountable. In Congress I intend to work across the aisle to focus on the following specific areas:

1. Lower domestic and communal violence while also improving community health
2. De-stigmatize mental illness especially for veterans and vulnerable populations
3. Advocate against corporations that may profit off of human suffering, or cause public health crises.

A healthy community is one where everyone is made to feel safe. Yet whether the challenge [is gun violence](#) (which in Omaha is still higher than the national average) or [domestic violence](#), these issues require intelligent solutions and community involvement. One way to create change on these issues is through policy. In Congress I will support or propose legislation akin to [the Violence Against Women Act](#) and [the Bipartisan Background Checks Act](#). Both common sense solutions that are bipartisan in nature.

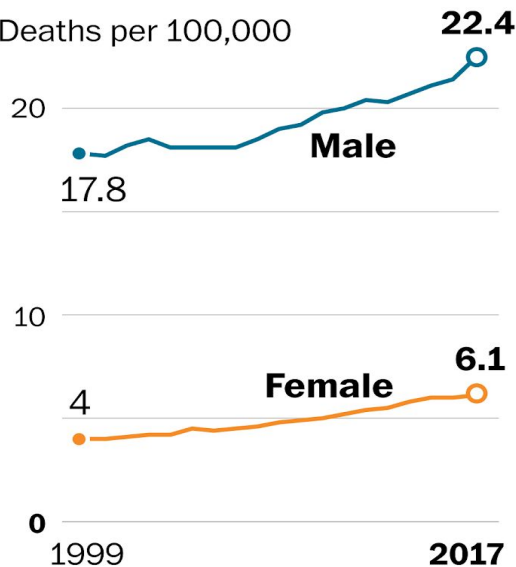
In addition, an equally important approach to tackling these problems is through community partnerships. As such, once in Congress I will support local NGOs and other groups connected to public health issues such as the Omaha Police Department and [Omaha 360](#) (who have both developed strong partnerships in our community and are seeing positive results when it comes to the reduction of gun violence). I will also partner with the Nebraska State Senators to form coalitions to address gun violence and community well-being. Ultimately, we need to create incentives so that police officers live in the communities they patrol to build trust and mutual respect across our city.

Secondly, we desperately need to take the mental health of our country seriously, and specifically prioritize vulnerable communities such as [our veterans](#). Because of social stigmas surrounding mental health issues, many people fail to seek treatment. As a result our country faces a mental health epidemic: [7.7 million](#) youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, and only half receive treatment. Nearly [1 in 3](#) eighteen-year olds are struggling with some form of anxiety, while [22](#) veterans commit suicide each day. It's time to start talking about these problems.

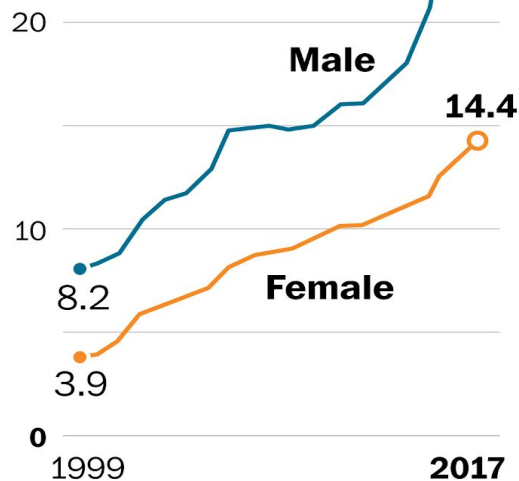
Rates of suicide and drug overdoses have continued to climb

SUICIDE

Deaths per 100,000



DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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In Congress, I will work across the aisle to better integrate veterans back into our society and to de-stigmatize mental health issues. To increase mental health aptitude and care, I will campaign to integrate mental health support into medical checkups and schools. For our veterans - who have given so much to our country - I believe that we should work to implement a voluntary [“reverse-bootcamp”](#) program that helps support and transition our soldiers back into civilian life.

Third and finally, I think it is every politician's obligation to hold corporations accountable if they put profits above human dignity and public health. Purdue Pharma is a prime example of what I have in mind: Since releasing OxyContin to the general public, Purdue Pharma has made more than [\\$35 billion](#). The [\\$635 million](#) fine they paid for false advertising around claims of non-addictiveness and tamper-proofing did little to disincentivize future criminal behaviors. This is only the tip of the iceberg. Once in Congress I intend to work across the aisle to punish such misleading behaviors, while also advocating for solutions akin to the [Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act](#).

Whether you believe in safe gun legislation (which many gun owners in NE-2 are incredibly judicious about!), preventing domestic violence, or helping our veterans re-acclimate to society, there are a number of challenges ahead that I will fight to overcome once in Congress. As your representative, I will do whatever it takes to make sure that communities across America, and

especially the vulnerable populations therein, are safe, prosperous and healthy. I invite you to join me in this fight.

For any comments, questions, or additional inquiries related to Kara's Public Health Plan, please reach out to admin@eastmanforcongress.com!