As opioid overdoses increase, public health experts are struggling to figure out what proportion are intentional. Last year, Massachusetts began officially recognizing that some opioid overdose deaths are suicides. According to state Department of Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, determining intent can be a challenge. Medical examiners use different criteria for identifying suicide deaths, and prejudice against substance abuse and suicide makes it difficult to collect accurate data. To address the possible link between opioid addiction and suicide risk, a few hospitals in Boston are asking patients about substance use and self-harm. Some experts argue that despair is a factor underlying both overdose and suicide deaths, possibly related to decreases in marriage rates and job security, and increases in self-reported pain. Michael Botticelli, director of the Boston Medical Center Grayken Center for Addiction, said that recovery programs can address despair by helping patients form supportive bonds with family and friends. "The vast majority of people I know who are in recovery often talk about this profound sense of reestablishing—and sometimes establishing for the first time—a connection to a much larger community," he said.

*Spark Extra!* Read about addressing despair through partnerships [2].

Links within this resource

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