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In a Town Where Meth Is Eclipsing Opioids, Everyone Feels the Pain

One Kentucky community has seen a wave of violence and homelessness as methamphetamine use returns.

By Timothy Williams

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LOUISA, Ky. — Home deliveries from the local food bank now require a police escort. A shop owner has started to carry her gun to work. And the local constable, who rarely had to pull his weapon in the past, has drawn it a dozen times over the past year.

All because people hooked on methamphetamine have threatened them.

For years, opioid addiction ravaged Louisa and its neighbors in Appalachia. But the sudden return of methamphetamine — in a powerful new form — has brought a sharply different set of problems to this small Kentucky town amid coal mines on the West Virginia border.

If pain pills left residents struggling to help many family members deal with the risk of overdose, methamphetamine has bred fear and division in the community of 2,500, especially as a growing number of users have begun living on the streets.

“Half the people want to take them to the river and tie something around their neck,” said the town’s mayor, Harold Slone, adding, “We hadn’t seen that level of anger before.”

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