

# New York hits big pharma with \$500mn lawsuit in opioid crisis

January 23 2018

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New York turned the screws on pharmaceutical giants in America's opioid epidemic, suing manufacturers for \$500 million on Tuesday as a photographer kickstarted a petition to hold Purdue Pharma accountable as a recovering addict.

The city filed the half-a-billion lawsuit in the New York State Supreme Court, following hundreds of other towns and cities in a bid to recoup costs from big pharma as they battle to contain the escalating opioid crisis.

"Who's getting away with bloody murder right now? The big pharmaceutical companies. That's what's really going on," New York Mayor Bill de Blasio told a news conference.

"Big pharma hooked millions of Americans on these drugs, deceived the people and the human cost has been inestimable. At the same time they made billions of dollars in the process," he added.

In 2016, 63,600 people died from a drug overdose in the United States, an average of 174 Americans a day. In 2016, overall US life expectancy fell for the second year running, fueled by the crisis.

In New York, the most populous US city and home to 8.5 million people, more than 1,000 people died in an [opioid overdose](#) in 2016, the highest year on record.

More New Yorkers died from opioid overdoses than from car accidents and homicides combined, with rates of overdose deaths more than doubling between 2010 and 2016.

"It's simple. It's time for big [pharma](#) to pay for what they have done. It's time for them to be held accountable," de Blasio said.

The lawsuit, like hundreds of others, accuses manufacturers of deceptive marketing and distributors of over-supplying prescription painkillers, burdening the city with increased healthcare, criminal justice and law enforcement costs.

The manufacturers named in the suit include Purdue Pharma, maker of OxyContin, the world's best-selling anti-pain medication; Teva Pharmaceuticals USA, Inc.; Johnson & Johnson, and Janssen Pharmaceuticals.

Mega-drug wholesalers named in the petition include McKesson Corporation, Cardinal Health and AmerisourceBergen Corporation.

## **Narrowly escaped**

Photographer Nan Goldin, herself a recovering opioid addict, is separately waging her own campaign to hold Purdue Pharma accountable for its role in the epidemic.

Goldin, 64, is circulating a petition, already signed by more than 6,000 people, demanding that Purdue Pharma and the family that owns it accept responsibility.

"I survived the opioid crisis. I narrowly escaped," she says in a statement accompanying her petition on [change.org](#).

After getting treatment, Goldin began researching the [opioid epidemic](#) and the mounting deaths.

"I learned that the Sackler family, whose name I knew from museums and galleries, were responsible for the epidemic," she said.

The Sacklers are descended from two brothers, Mortimer and Raymond Sackler, who helped build Purdue into a pharmaceutical powerhouse.

Goldin has formed an advocacy group, Prescription Addiction Intervention Now, or PAIN, to pressure the Sackler family and Purdue Pharma to finance treatment and prevention programs, and to re-educate doctors on the dangers of over-prescription of opioids.

Her petition, which circulates on Twitter under the hashtag #ShameOnSackler, calls on museums and universities who benefit from Sackler money—including the Metropolitan Museum, the Guggenheim and Harvard—"to refuse future donations from the Sacklers."

Purdue Pharma, which already faces a string of lawsuits, says in an open letter on its website that it is acting to bring the epidemic under control.

"Our industry and our company have and will continue to take meaningful action to reduce [opioid abuse](#)," it said, adding that it was supporting initiatives to educate doctors and develop non-opioid painkillers.

Elizabeth Sackler, a daughter of one of the company's founders, told The New York Times that Purdue Pharma's role in the [opioid](#) crisis was "morally abhorrent to me."

Goldin, who lives between New York and Paris, became known in the 1970s with photographs that pushed the boundaries of intimacy and

spontaneity, breaking numerous taboos on sexuality. Her work has been exhibited in top museums, including MoMA.

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Citation: New York hits big pharma with \$500mn lawsuit in opioid crisis (2018, January 23)  
retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-01-york-big-pharma-500mn-lawsuit.html>

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