



Message from the Executive Director, John Kanig

Greetings from Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

We're off to a great start this year. As we begin executing new strategies and expanding our resources, Puerto Rico has seated a new Governor. The Honorable Jenniffer González-Colón was elected on November 5th, 2024, and took office on January 2nd, 2025. Governor González-Colón has demonstrated her support for law enforcement throughout her political career. She was a strong proponent of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative as well as the Caribbean Border Counter Narcotic Strategy. We look forward to a productive relationship with her administration going forward. In addition, we are in the final stage of going operational with the CGIC at the HIDTA facility. Equipment has been procured, candidates have been identified, and the office buildout has been completed. We anticipate launching operations in the second quarter of 2025. Finally, we would like to congratulate former FBI SAC Joseph Gonzalez who was recently appointed to the position of Commissioner of Police with the Puerto Rico Police Bureau. Commissioner Gonzalez has been a valuable member of the HIDTA Executive Board, and we look forward to continuing this relationship. We wish him all the best.



Partner Profile

POLICE COMMISSIONER MARIO BROOKS

Mario Brooks was born on December 28, 1971 on the Island of St. Thomas. He is an accomplished law enforcement professional and military officer with a distinguished career spanning more than 30 years. He is a son of the soil who spent his younger years moving between islands, ultimately returning home to the Virgin Islands in 1991. Upon his return, he was directed to join the Virgin Islands Army National Guard. He graduated from Basic Training and Military Police Advanced Individual Training in 1992 and returned home to the Virgin Islands.



In 1994, Mario embarked on his career with the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) as part of the esteemed 94-1 "few but strong" class. His skill and determination quickly caught the attention of his superiors, earning him an early assignment to the Special Operations Bureau, where he would serve the majority of his law enforcement career. His outstanding service culminated in his appointment as Assistant Commissioner of Police in 2020, a position he held with distinction, having also served as Acting Commissioner on multiple occasions. Mario is a seasoned law enforcement and military professional. He holds associate and bachelor's degrees in arts from the University of the Virgin Islands and a master's degree in arts from the George H. Walker School of Business. He transitioned quite frequently from his civilian law enforcement career to that of his military career for deployments and he was very successful and moved up the ranks. He currently holds the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and is an active member of the Virgin Islands National Guard.

Mr. Brooks' notable achievements throughout his extensive career in law enforcement are too numerous to mention, however they include establishing a regional intelligence- sharing network, the expansion of the Virgin Islands Police Department's marine enforcement capabilities and the establishment of a cutting-edge drone program to support the safety and security of the territory.

As the Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department, Mr. Brooks continues to lead with vision, inspiring those around him.

PR-USVI HIDTA BIDS FAREWELL TO PHA AMULEN WIRSIY



Ms. Wirsy joined the HIDTA team in 2022 as the Public Health Analyst. She split her time between the VI Department of Health and HIDTA bridging the gap between Public Health, Public Safety, and Prevention. Her work here in the territory has been impactful, to say the least. She became an intricate partner in the US Virgin Islands HIDTA Prevention Initiative, connecting with young students and mentoring them on positive life choices. She appeared on numerous radio and television shows promoting the VI Prevention Initiative and bringing awareness about the threat of Opioids and other drugs.

Ms. Wirsy recently accepted a position with the Georgia Dept of Health as the Viral Hepatitis Team Leader. She is moving to Atlanta to continue her career in Public Health. We wish her all the best in the next chapter of her career serving the public. Thank you Amulen, you will be missed.

PREVENTION

US VIRGIN ISLANDS HIDTA PREVENTION INITIATIVE PRESCRIPTION DRUG DROP BOX PROGRAM

On February 12, 2025, the US Virgin Islands HIDTA Prevention Initiative launched the Prescription Drug Drop Box Program territory wide. In partnership with the US Virgin Islands Police Department, Virgin Islands Department of Health, Overdose Response Strategy, Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Postal Service, and the Drug Enforcement Administration, five drop boxes were installed in the lobbies of Post Offices on St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. This resource gives the residents of the Virgin Islands the ability to safely dispose of prescription drugs that are expired or no longer needed. This is another avenue to safely dispose of these medicines and keep them out of the hands of would-be-abusers/users. This disposal resource also keeps people from dumping or flushing these substances that could contaminate our water table and environment. The deposits of the drop boxes will be collected each month by HIDTA TFO's and will be processed for destruction.



Left: Executive Director John Kanig, VIPD Police Commissioner Mario Brooks, DEA ASAC Evan Martinez, Deputy Director James Doby, DEA SAC Michael Miranda, US Attorney Delia Smith, PHA Amulen Wirsiy, DIO Rodney F. Querrard at the press conference of the launch. Right: St. Thomas/St. John district Post Master David Stevens, SAC Michael Miranda, Commissioner Mario Brooks, Executive Director John Kanig, DIO Rodney F. Querrard, Deputy Director James Doby, PHA Amulen Wirsiy pose with a Prescription Drug Drop Box inside of the Sugar Estate Post Office.

Protect your every day.
If you **see** something,
say something

REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY
340-776-3015
or **9-1-1** in case of emergency



*If You See Something, Say Something® used with permission of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Authority.



US VIRGIN ISLANDS HIDTA PREVENTION INITIATIVE 2025 PSA COMPETITION

We are excited to announce the closure of another successful US Virgin Islands HIDTA Prevention Initiative PSA Competition. It ran from February 7th to March 7th. Students in grades 6-8 territory wide were invited to showcase their creativity in a prevention message about Peer Pressure, Violence or Substance Abuse/Misuse. The 1st Place Winners were from a student group at Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School on St. Thomas and was titled, "Peer Pressure." Their innovative Public Service Announcement impressed the judges with its clarity, impact, and creativity. As 1st Place winners, each of the four students received \$500 cash, a certificate, and a tablet (with one-year subscription) and swag bag from VIYA. There was an Honorable Mention prize for a student group from the Lockhart K-8 School with an entry titled, "Edibles." Their PSA stood out for its engaging message and originality. As a reward, each of the four students received \$100 in cash, a certificate, and an exclusive swag bag from VIYA.

We thank all of our sponsors for supporting this initiative. We look forward to future competitions and continuing to foster the talents of young creators throughout the US Virgin Islands.



Left: Deputy Director James Doby, Virgin Islands National Guard Analyst Barbara Guishard, PHA Amulen Wirsiy, DIO Rodney F. Querrard and Stephon Smith of VIYA pictured with 1st Place Winners. Right: Honorable Mention Team posing with PHA Amulen Wirsiy, Deputy Director James Doby and DIO Rodney F. Querrard.

Empower U Youth Summit

The US Virgin Islands HIDTA Prevention Initiative on March 1st on St. Thomas and March 15th on St. John joined the University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in an "Empowering the Next Generation" Empower U Youth Summit. Throughout the territorial event, students engaged in group discussions, self-efficacy activities, financial education, and mental health prevention sessions. PHA Amulen Wirsiy led engaging sessions on the powerful topics of peer pressure and conflict resolution, equipping students with valuable skills like confidence and boundaries to navigate challenging situations. By focusing on self-awareness, communication, and problem-solving strategies, students were encouraged to make positive choices and find peaceful resolutions to conflicts. The goal was not just to educate, but to inspire youth to become leaders in their communities, using their newfound skills to reduce substance use through peer pressure, and build healthier, more supportive environments among themselves.



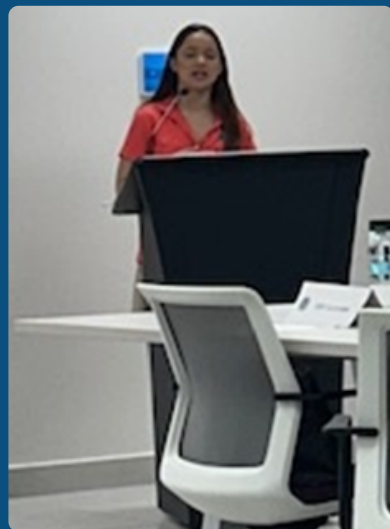
Left: PHA Amulen Wirsiy at the Empower U Youth Summit on St. John. Right: PHA Amulen Wirsiy using interactive platforms to engage students at the UVI Empower U Youth Summit on St. Thomas



PREVENTION INITIATIVE, PUERTO RICO - ALIANZA

ALIANZA Prevention Initiative briefs the Executive Board on 2024 accomplishments in Puerto Rico. Guest speaker Samantha Delgado from Baldwin School shared how the Prevention Council initiative has benefited her school and fellow students.

The Alliance for a Drug-Free Puerto Rico 2024 report was presented to the Executive Board at the previous meeting, emphasizing the ongoing prevention services through the life skills workshops strategy, which culminated in the production of prevention television advertisements. The year ended with the participation of 1,660 students, six prevention new media productions, and four Prevention Councils that were established in four schools in different districts. Samantha Delgado from Baldwin School shared how the Prevention Council initiative has benefited her school and fellow students. The first edition of the Prevention Newsletter, a collaboration with HIDTA's Prevention Committee, began distribution to all HIDTA PR-USVI members.



Samantha Delgado from Baldwin School briefing Board Members

OVERDOSE RESPONSE STRATEGY

ORS TEAMS BRIEF THE PR-USVI HIDTA EXECUTIVE BOARD

On February 19th, DIO Rodney F. Querrard and PHA Amulen Wirsy briefed the HIDTA Executive Board on the USVI HIDTA Prevention Initiative accomplishments to date. Since its start in 2021, the Initiative hosted student engagement discussions with over 10,000 students at various schools across St. John, St. Thomas and St. Croix. In 2024, the focus was on the 3rd through 12th graders. Initiative members made radio and television appearances throughout the year discussing drug threats and efforts the initiative is taking to ensure that the residents of the USVI are informed.

In 2024, PHA Wirsy led a drug use survey targeting incarcerated individuals on St. Thomas in an effort to better understand drug threats inside detention facilities. This survey was done in conjunction with the University of the Virgin Islands Cell Program.



PHA Amulen Wirsy and DIO Rodney F. Querrard brief the Executive Board on performance accomplishments.

DIO José Rodríguez and PHA Francisco Torres-Cardona presented the PR ORS projects, featuring the inclusion of the Institute of Forensic Sciences (ICF in Spanish) as an overdose data sharing partner and an environmental scan report on public safety agencies. Since September 2024, IFC has entered data on suspected fatal overdose cases through ODMAP, after a preliminary toxicology test result in a period of 24-48 hours from the approximate time of death. Also, IFC shared data sets on death by intoxication cases between years 2018 and 2024 (see page 6 for an analysis on this data).

Following the 2022 environmental scan reports on public health projects and services for people who use drugs, a latest report was created from the visits to public safety agencies conducted during December 2023. Findings and recommendations were shared with the Executive Board Members.

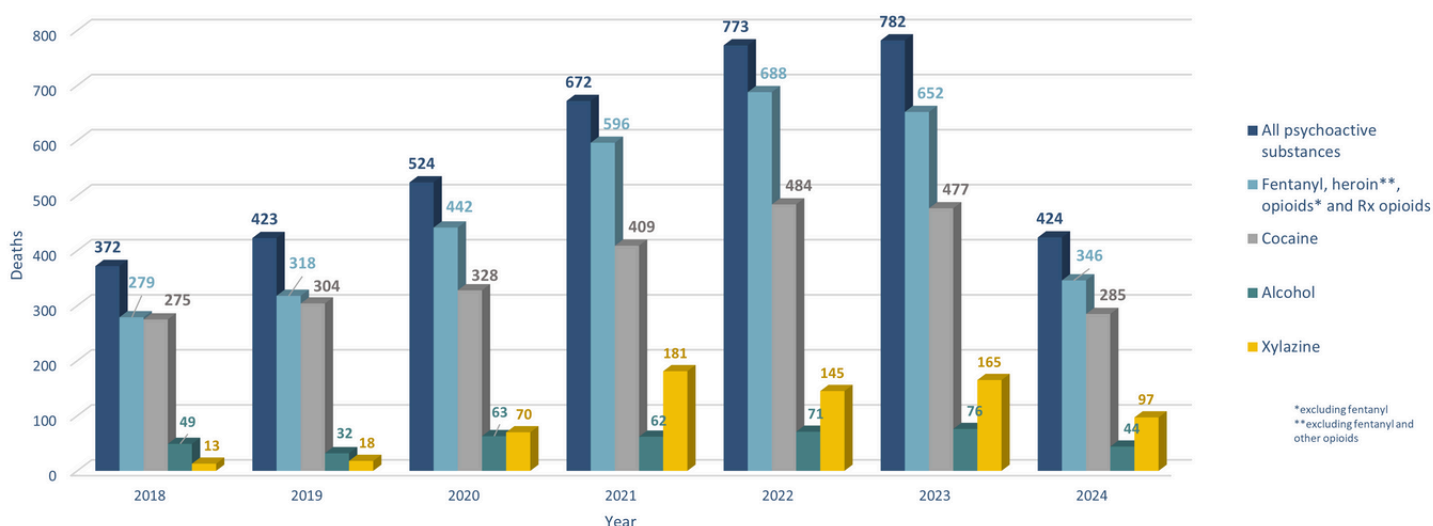
DEATHS BY INTOXICATION WITH PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

As of January 29th, 2025, a total of 3,970 individuals in Puerto Rico have lost their lives by intoxication between 2018 and 2024. Data provided by the Institute of Forensic Sciences (ICF in Spanish) places fentanyl as the leading psychoactive substance registered in close to three quarters (73.8%) of the fatal cases, followed by cocaine in two thirds (67.5%) of the cases. Xylazine, a veterinarian anesthetic known as “anestesia de caballo” (horse anesthetic), was registered in 689 cases (13.9%).

The highest quantities of fatal overdoses were registered during years 2022 and 2023, counting for more than 750 cases each year. Due to a backlog of cases pending confirmatory toxicology results or other forensic analysis procedure, year 2024 reports a total of 424 fatal overdoses, with fentanyl registered in four fifths (78.8%) of the cases, cocaine in two thirds (67.2%) and xylazine in almost a quarter (22.8%). Graphic 1 shows a breakdown of psychoactive substances registered in fatal overdose cases from 2018 to 2024.



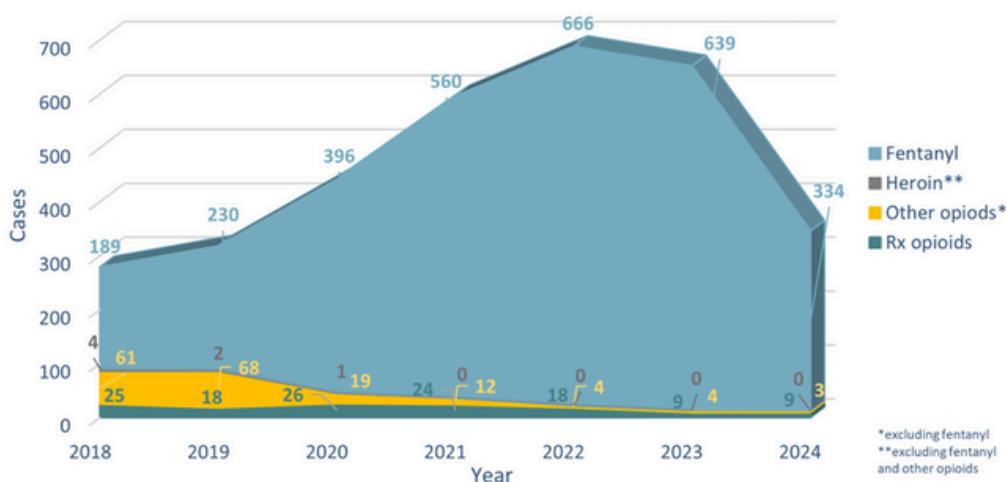
Graphic 1: Deaths by intoxication with psychoactive substances, 2018-2024



Source: Institute of Forensic Sciences, January 2025

Among opioid analgesics -a category that includes opiates (morphine, codeine), semi-synthetic (heroin, buprenorphine) and synthetic (methadone, fentanyl) opioids-, fentanyl was registered in an average of 89.4% of fatal overdoses between years 2018 and 2024. A distribution of the different opioids registered in fatal overdose cases is represented in graphic 2.

Graphic 2: Deaths by intoxication with opioid analgesics, 2018-2024



Source: Institute of Forensic Sciences, January 2025

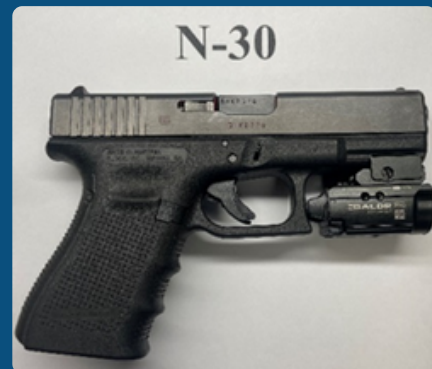
HIDTA INVESTIGATIVE SUCCESS

HIDTA TF-4

In June 2023 DEA Agents with HIDTA TF-4 initiated an investigation based on information from a Confidential Source (CS-1) regarding a target in Mexico working as part of a DTO that transports fentanyl from Mexico into Southern California, where it's further distributed by US Mail to Puerto Rico and other locations within the United States.

In August 2023, DEA Agents utilized a CS to purchase 2000 of their fake "m-30" pills containing fentanyl from Israel ZUNIGA Cervantes. A payment for the shipment was made to Jose COBIAN Flores. In August 2023, ZUNIGA Cervantes sent a second shipment containing 10,000 fentanyl pills to CS-1. Through coordination with USPS inspectors in California this shipment was intercepted prior to departing California. In October 2023, ZUNIGA Cervantes sent a third shipment containing 10,000 fentanyl to CS-1, which was intercepted by DEA in Puerto Rico. On November 1, 2023, a payment for this shipment of \$70,000 USC was coordinated between CS and targets.

On February 5, 2025, a grand jury in the District of Puerto Rico returned an indictment and issued arrest warrants for Israel ZUNIGA Cervantes, Javier ZUNIGA Ochoa, Mauricio RODRIGUEZ Sanchez and Jose VARGAS Nunez. All these individuals have prior criminal records and have been previously deported from the United States.



HIDTA TF-4

In August 2022, Opioids Initiative started an investigation into a (DTO) responsible for manufacturing fentanyl pills in Mexico, smuggling them into the United States, distributing them from California to various states and Puerto Rico. In February 2023 investigators indicted two dual-national United States-Mexican citizens (SOSs) in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico, two couriers in California, and one courier in Puerto Rico. One SOS is still a fugitive. Investigators became aware of a courier in Puerto Rico, but did not have enough evidence to indict him.



In August 2024, HIDTA Opioid Initiative, in coordination with (USPIS) Puerto Rico, seized and executed a controlled delivery of 10,000 "M-30" fentanyl pills weighing approximately one-kilogram to VALDES, resulting in the arrest of VALDES and an associate. Following the forensic examination of VALDES' cellular device, investigators were able to identify a conspiracy involving thirty additional DTO members sending kilogram quantities of fentanyl from California to Puerto Rico, New York, Connecticut, Florida and Illinois for distribution and sending kilogram quantities of cocaine from Puerto Rico to New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Illinois. Investigators were able to trace one of the sources of fentanyl back to one of the previously indicted SOSs in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Ten additional targets involved in the fentanyl aspect of this conspiracy were indicted on March 5, 2025.

Acknowledging this administration's priorities, there was one Title 8 target in California related to the distribution of a one-kilogram brick of powder fentanyl. Based on information gleaned through LE databases and target devices, investigators were able to retroactively attribute fourteen packages seized by USPIS over the past eighteen months to this DTO.

FAJARDO TASK FORCE GROUP 2

On November 20, 2024, a federal indictment and true bill for Regional Priority Organization Target (RPOT) Luis Mariano ROJA (hereinafter ROJA) was secured by HIDTA Fajardo Task Force Group II (TFG II) agents for violations to 21 U.S.C 959(a), 960(a)(3), 963, and 952(a). ROJA was the leader of a transnational criminal organization (TCO) responsible for smuggling multi-ton cocaine shipments via go-fast vessels destined to the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the United States. ROJA was sourced by the Narco-Terrorist Organizations Clan Del Golfo (CDG) and National Liberation Army (ELN) groups operating in Norte de Santander and the North coast of Colombia.



*Enforcement Agents with arrested
Luis Mariano ROJA*

Based on the indictment, HIDTA Fajardo TFG II conducted necessary processes with the District of Puerto Rico United States Attorney's Office and Office of International Affairs in efforts to conduct extradition processes and obtain a Provisional Arrest Warrant (PAW) against ROJA. Once the PAW was obtained by the Government of Colombia, on January 24, 2025, Colombian National Police, working in direct collaboration with DEA Cartagena Resident Office, executed the PAW against ROJA in Valledupar, Colombia. ROJA is currently pending extradition to the District of Puerto Rico.

CARIBBEAN CORRIDOR STRIKE FORCE

Agents assigned to the CCSF provided support to DEA New York related to a target based out of Puerto Rico sending large amounts of cocaine from Puerto Rico to New York. CCSF agents supported DEA New York by arresting the target and were able to develop a financial investigation against the target. On the same date of the arrest, CCSF agents seized 350 kilograms of cocaine, 4 rifles and \$750,000 in cash. CCSF agents analyzed past cellphone locations which pointed out to a warehouse storage in the San Juan area. As a result, CCSF agents were able to develop probable cause to execute a search warrant at the storage unit. CCSF agents seized 32 Rolex watches appraised for 1.3 million dollars and multiple documents.

Upon analysis of the documents which included bank statements, vehicles licenses and real estate documents; CCSF agents were able to identify assets in multiple financial institution and identify the properties. As a result of the financial analysis, CCSF agents seized three bank accounts containing \$250,000, seized seven properties valued at 1.5 million dollars and two luxury vehicles. The main target of investigation was sentenced to 24 years of prison and the sentencing was based on the indictment from New York and the additional details discovered by CCSF. During interviews, the target stated that he wanted to make at least 26 million dollars and retire.



Seized Property

**THE VIRGIN ISLANDS FUSION CENTER
IS NOW A PROUD MEMBER OF THE
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For more information about Virgin Islands Fusion Center SHIELD
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