

18134 Trump demands death penalty for drug dealers

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Judges should tackle the US's drug epidemic by sentencing dealers to death, President Trump said as he announced a new plan to combat opioid addiction.

Laying out the initiative in New Hampshire, one of the states that has been hit hardest by the opioid crisis, Mr Trump said: "This scourge of drug addiction in America will stop. It will stop. Whether you are a dealer or a doctor or a trafficker or a manufacturer, if you break the law and illegally peddle these deadly poisons, we will find you, we will arrest you and we will hold you accountable."

Mr Trump blamed traffickers bringing drugs from Mexico and China. "Some of these drug dealers will kill thousands of people during their lifetime — thousands of people — and destroy many more lives than that," he said. "If we don't get tough on all the drug dealers, we're wasting our time. And that toughness includes the death penalty."

The president gave few details about how capital punishment would be expanded but, according to a spokesman, the White House will direct the Department of Justice to use existing laws to seek the penalty in certain cases.

The measures announced also included a goal to cut the number of legitimate prescriptions for highly addictive opioid painkillers by a third, and spending \$6 billion over two years on federal programmes to combat addiction. To promote the plan, known as the Initiative to Stop Opioid Abuse, the White House will also launch a website and advertising campaign to educate the public.

Federal prosecutors can seek capital punishment for leaders of criminal drug enterprises whose activities lead directly to deaths. Mr Trump said tougher punishments would also be sought for lower-level dealers.

An epidemic of drug overdoses has gripped the US since a campaign by drugmakers to expand prescriptions of addictive painkillers. Patients on opioid-based medicines became hooked on the drugs and moved on to more powerful drugs such as heroin, or illicit mixtures of synthetic opioids, often trafficked from abroad. A public health crisis has ensued as addicts have sought more powerful forms of the drugs.

Mr Trump believes harsher punitive measures are the most effective policy to stop the drug epidemic. However, experts were sceptical of the plan. An economist at the University of Virginia, said: "There is no evidence that the death penalty deters drug dealing. The White House's proposal would likely do more harm than good."