



## Opioid-related Fatal Overdoses: January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2023

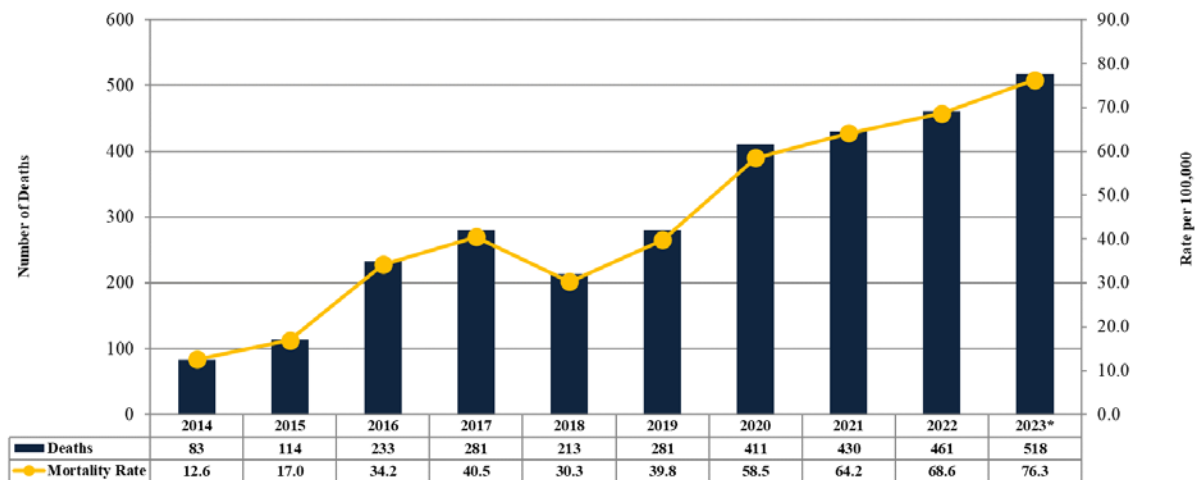
Report Date: March 20, 2024

The DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated a total of **2,595<sup>1</sup>** deaths due to the use of opioids from January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2023. This report examines the presence of opioids (*heroin, fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, morphine, prescription opioids and the general category of opiates*) in deaths observed at the OCME.

### Trends in Deaths due to Opioid Use

Similarly, to the rest of the country, the number of fatal opioid overdoses in the District increased between 2014 and 2017 (Fig.1(a)). Despite observing a decrease in fatal opioid overdoses in 2018, the number of opioid overdoses increased by 32% (n=281) in 2019. On average, there were 17 fatal opioid overdoses per month in 2018 and 23 opioid overdoses per month in 2019. This rate increase to 38 deaths per month in 2022. **In 2023, 518 opioid-related fatalities were certified by OCME with an average of 43 deaths per month.**

Fig. 1(a): Number and Mortality Rate of Opioid-Related Fatal Overdoses in DC by Year: 2014-2023

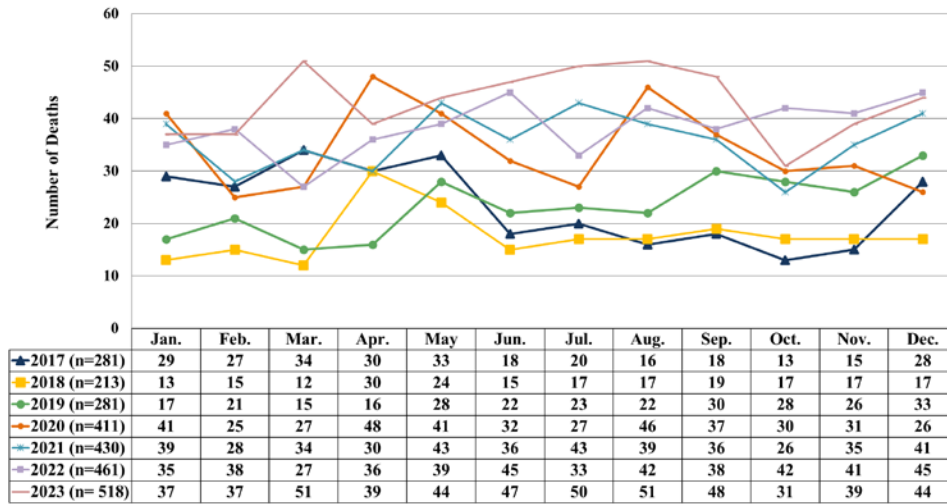


The mortality rate for 2023 is provisional pending the final case closure and Census ACS population estimate.

<sup>1</sup> The data presented in this report includes 33 cases with deaths due to opioid drug use where the Manner of Death was not "Accident": 5 cases in 2014, 2 cases in 2015, 4 cases in 2016, 5 cases in 2017, 2 cases in 2018, 3 cases in 2019, 6 cases in 2021, 4 cases in 2022, and 5 in 2023.



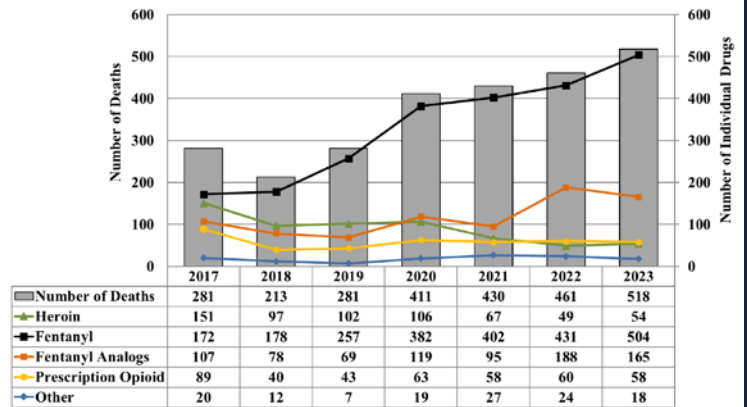
Fig. 1(b): Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Month and Year (N=2595)



**Incidence of Opioids by Year**

Figure 2 displays the illicit and prescription opioids identified through toxicology testing of the decedents from 2017 through December 31, 2023. In 2016, the most prevalent drug identified was heroin. However, beginning in 2017, the most prevalent drug identified is fentanyl. The most prevalent fentanyl analogs identified are furanyl fentanyl, p-fluoroisbutyryl fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl (4-ANPP).

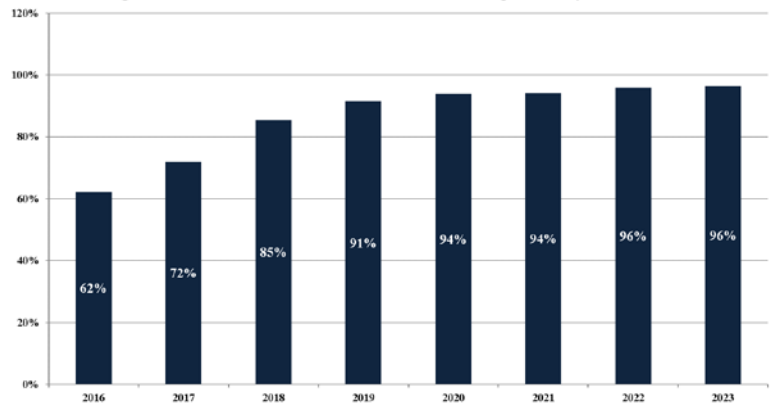
Fig. 2: Total Number of Opioid Drugs Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year (All Opioids)



**Increase in Fentanyl/Fentanyl Analogs in Opioid Overdoses**

Figure 3 highlights the increasing percentage of cases containing fentanyl or fentanyl analogs. The percentage of cases containing fentanyl or a fentanyl analog has gradually increased since 2015. In 2016, 62% of cases involved fentanyl or a fentanyl analog. The noticeable increase in the presence of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs began in March 2016, with over half of the cases containing fentanyl.

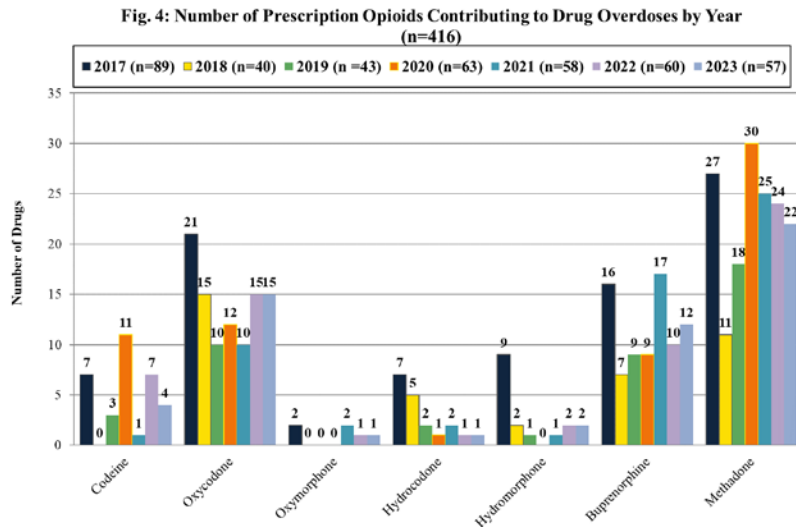
Figure 3: Percent of Overdose Deaths Involving Fentanyl 2016-2023



**Polysubstance**

**Prescription Opioids**

There were **410** prescription opioids found in opioid overdoses from 2017 through December 31, 2023 (Fig. 4). The number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid overdoses decreased significantly between 2017 (n=89) and 2018 (n=40). However, the number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid deaths increased to 63 in 2020. Figure 4 illustrates that methadone, oxycodone, and buprenorphine are currently the most prevalent prescription opioids identified among opioid-related fatalities at OCME.



**Emerging Drug Misuse and Mixed Use - Xylazine**

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration<sup>2</sup>, U.S. Food and Drug Administration<sup>3</sup>, and The White House<sup>4</sup> have issued public health safety alerts regarding increased trafficking and lethality of xylazine mixed with fentanyl and other illicit drugs. Since 2020, OCME has observed an increasing presence of xylazine in opioid related deaths (Table 1).

Year	# of Deaths
2020	3
2021	6
2022	11
2023	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dea.gov/alert/dea-reports-widespread-threat-fentanyl-mixed-xylazine>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-alerts-health-care-professionals-risks-patients-exposed-xylazine-illicit-drugs>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/04/12/biden-harris-administration-designates-fentanyl-combined-with-xylazine-as-an-emerging-threat-to-the-united-states/>

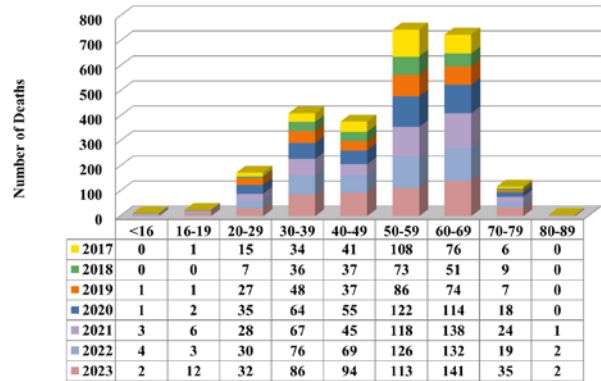


## Demographics

### Age

Approximately **71%** of all fatal opioid overdoses occur among adults between the ages of 40-69 years old (Fig. 5). **29%** of deaths due to opioid use occurred among people ages 50 to 59.

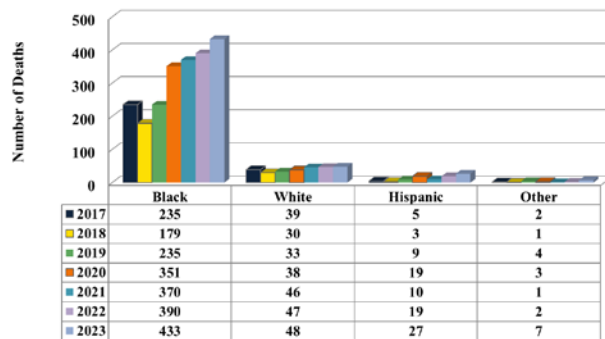
Fig. 5: Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Age



### Race/Ethnicity

Overall, **2,193** or **84%** of all deaths due to opioid use were among Blacks (Fig. 6). This trend remains consistent across years.

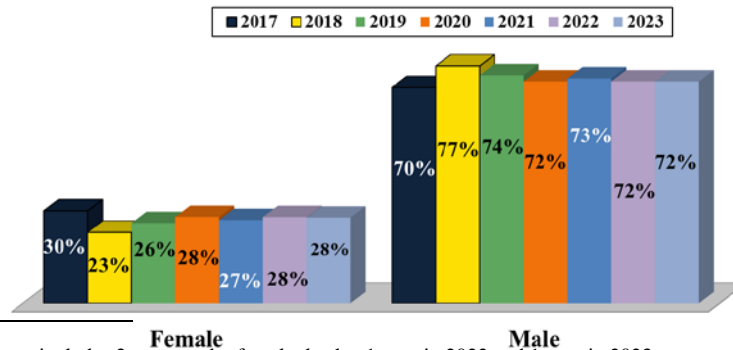
Fig. 6: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Race/Ethnicity and Year



### Gender<sup>5</sup>

Fatal overdoses due to opioid drug use were more common among **males** (Fig. 7).

Figure 7: Percentage of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Gender and Year

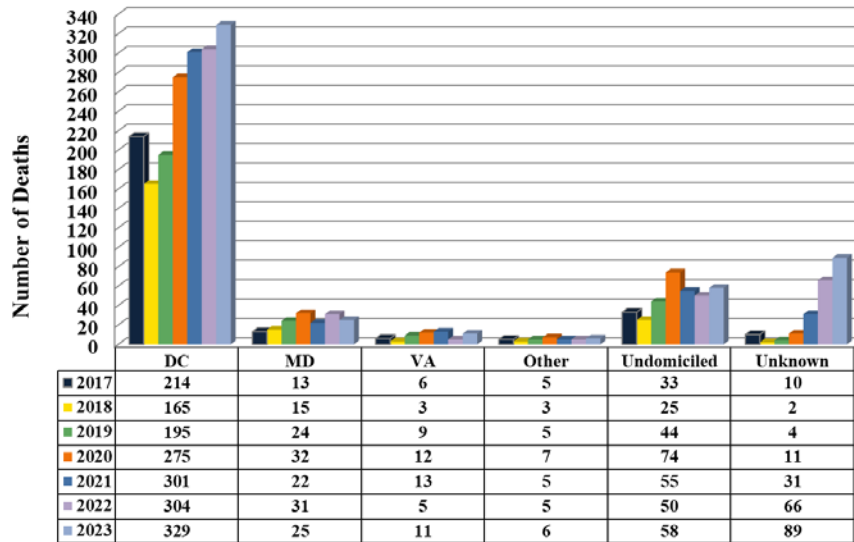


<sup>5</sup>The data presented in this report includes 2 transgender female deaths; 1 case in 2022 and 1 case in 2023.

## Jurisdiction of Residence

The majority of the decedents were residents of DC (Fig.8). From 2017 to December 31, 2023 overdoses were most prevalent amongst DC residents of **Wards 5, 7 & 8** (n=1,153) (Fig.9). However, there are variations across years.

**Fig. 8: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Jurisdiction of Residence and Year**



**Fig. 9: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Ward of Residence and Year**

