



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER**  
 401 E Street, SW – 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
 Washington, DC 20024



**Opioid-related Fatal Overdoses: January 1, 2018 to March 31, 2024**

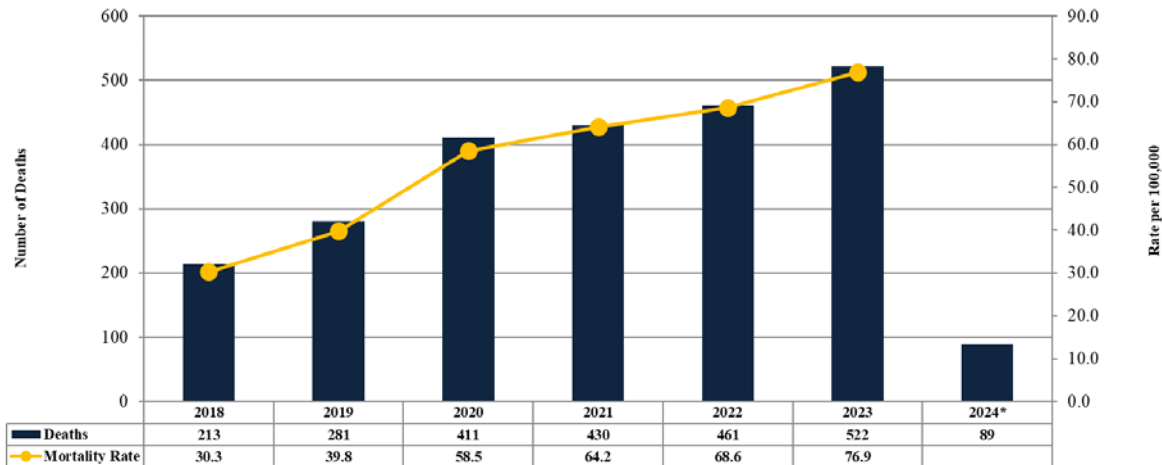
*Report Date: July 12, 2024*

The DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated a total of **2,407<sup>1</sup>** deaths due to the use of opioids from January 1, 2018 through March 31, 2024. 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 continue to rise at an alarming rate (Fig.1(a)). On average, there were 17 fatal opioid overdoses per month in 2018 and 23 opioid overdoses per month in 2019. This rate increased to 38 deaths per month in 2022 and 43 deaths per month in 2023. **Currently in 2024, 89 opioid-related fatalities have been certified by OCME.**

**Fig. 1(a): Number and Mortality Rate of Opioid-Related Fatal Overdoses in DC by Year: 2018-2024**

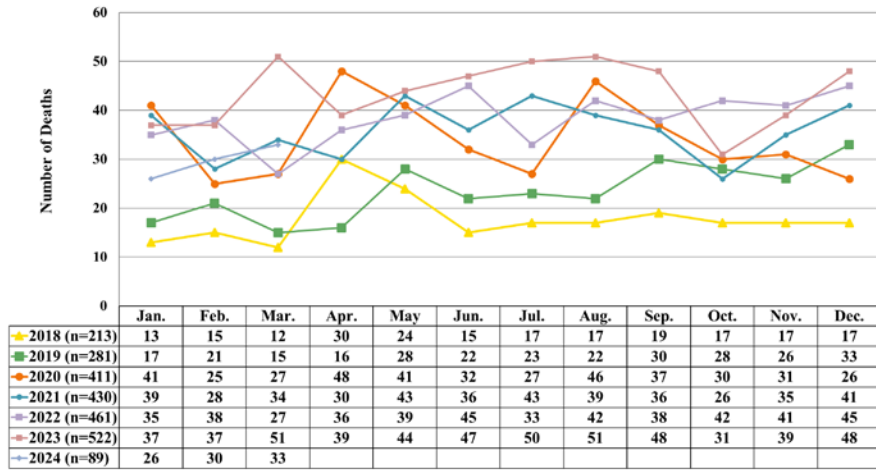


\*The mortality rate for 2024 is unavailable due to pending Census ACS population estimates.

<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”: 2 cases in 2018, 3 cases in 2019, 6 cases in 2021, 4 cases in 2022, 7 in 2023, and 1 case in 2024.



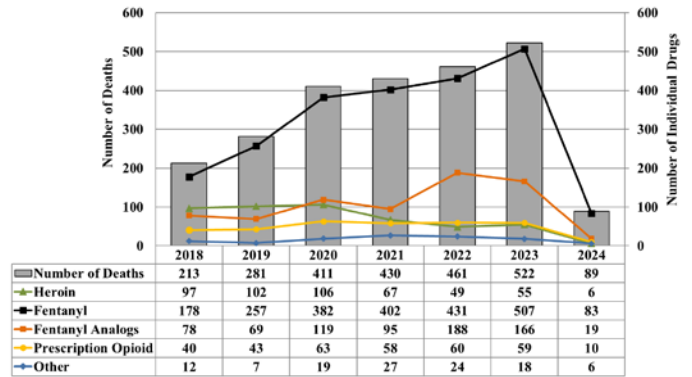
Fig. 1(b): Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Month and Year (N=2407)



**Incidence of Opioids by Year**

Figure 2 displays the illicit and prescription opioids identified through toxicology testing of the decedents from 2018 through March 31, 2024. In the past, heroin was the most prevalent drug, however, beginning in 2017, the most prevalent drug identified was fentanyl and this continues to be true. The most prevalent fentanyl analogs identified are fluorofentanyl, p-fluoroisbutyryl fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl (4-ANPP).

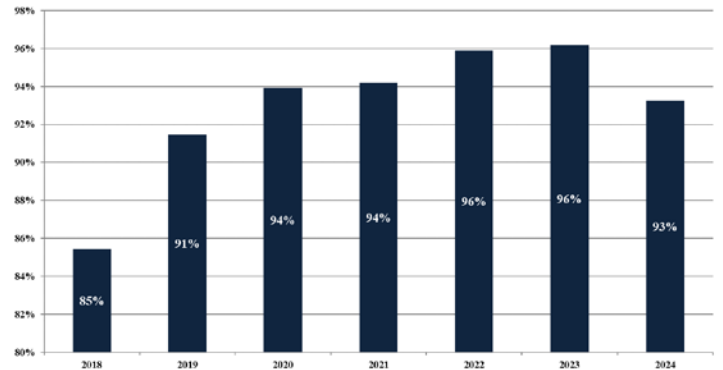
Fig. 2: Total Number of Opioid Drugs Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year (All Opioids)



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

Figure 3 highlights the increasing percentage of cases containing fentanyl or fentanyl analogs. In 2018, 85% of cases involved fentanyl or fentanyl analog with a noticeable increase between 2018 and 2019. More than half of the cases contain fentanyl and throughout the years, these numbers continue to rise.

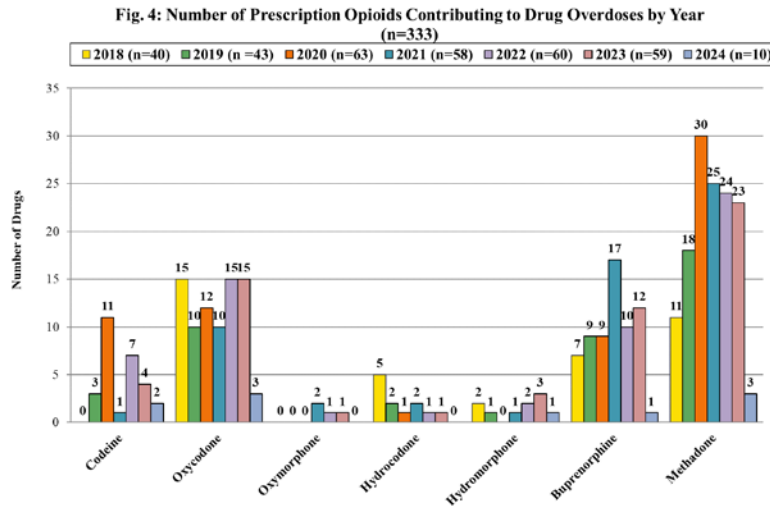
Figure 3: Percent of Overdose Deaths Involving Fentanyl 2018-2024



**Polysubstance**

**Prescription Opioids**

There were 333 prescription opioids found in opioid overdoses from 2018 through March 31, 2024 (Fig. 4). The number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid overdoses decreased significantly in 2018 (n=40). However, the number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid deaths increased to 63 in 2020. Figure 4 illustrates that methadone and oxycodone are currently the most prevalent prescription opioids identified.



**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
2024	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</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>

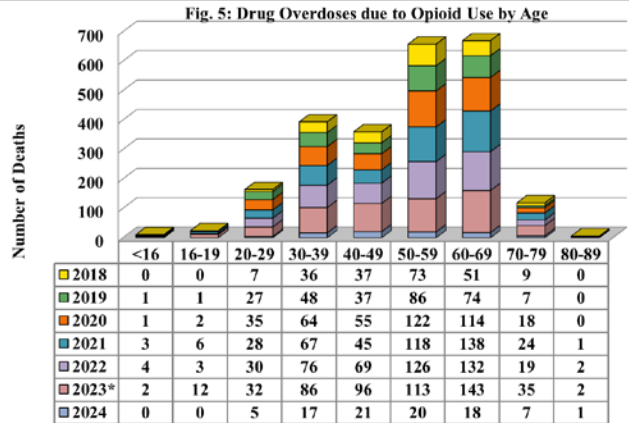
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/04/12/biden-harris-administration-designates-fentanyl-combined-with-xylazine-as-an-emerging-threat-to-the-united-states/>



## Demographics

### Age

Approximately **70%** of all fatal opioid overdoses occur among adults between the ages of 40-69 years old (Fig. 5). **55%** of deaths due to opioid use occurred among people ages 50 to 69.

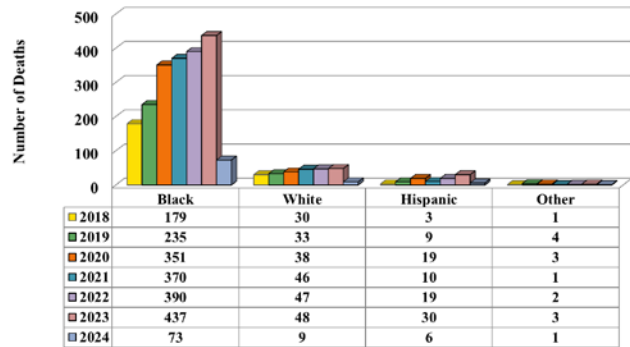


\*1 fetal death not included in any age range

### Race/Ethnicity

Overall, **2,035** or **84%** of all deaths due to opioid use were among Blacks (Fig. 6). This trend remains consistent over the years.

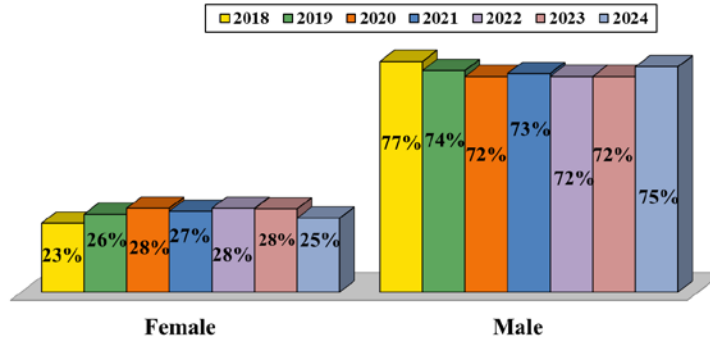
**Fig. 6: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Race/Ethnicity and Year**



### 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**

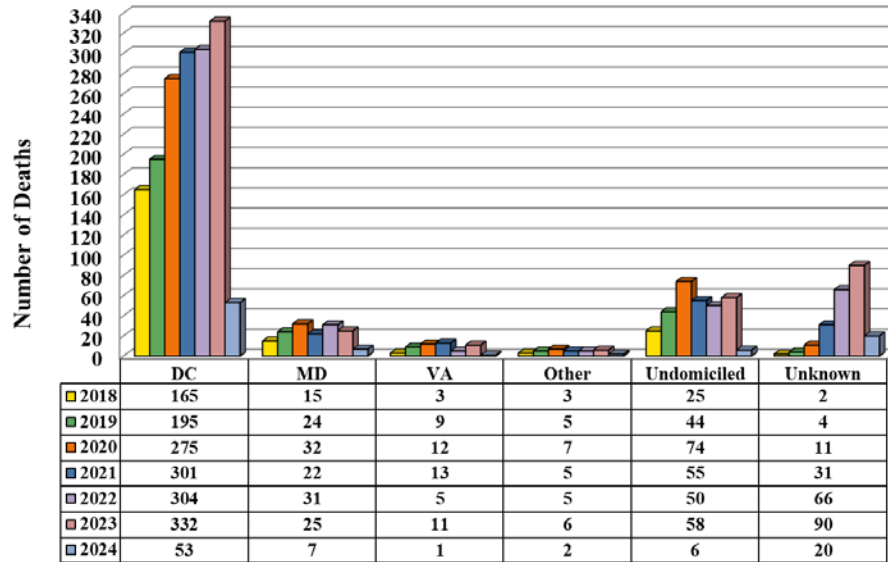


<sup>5</sup>The data presented in this report includes 2 transgender female deaths; 1 case in 2022 and 1 case in 2023.

## Jurisdiction of Residence

The majority of the decedents were residents of DC (Fig.8). From 2018 to March 31, 2024 overdoses were most prevalent amongst DC residents of **Wards 5, 7 & 8** (n=1,048) (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**

