

Increasing Racial Disparities in Ohio Overdose Rates

Data Brief, January 2025

Ohio has consistently been one of the states most impacted by the opioid epidemic. As noted by the Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) most recent Drug Overdose Report (October 2024), overall overdose deaths decreased in 2022 and 2023 and the decline is expected to continue based on CDC data (Fig. 1). It is unclear if these decreases will affect all demographic groups equally. Demographic data reveal that the non-Hispanic Black population has been increasingly impacted by the epidemic, with an overdose death rate far exceeding those of non-Hispanic White and Hispanic populations since 2018.

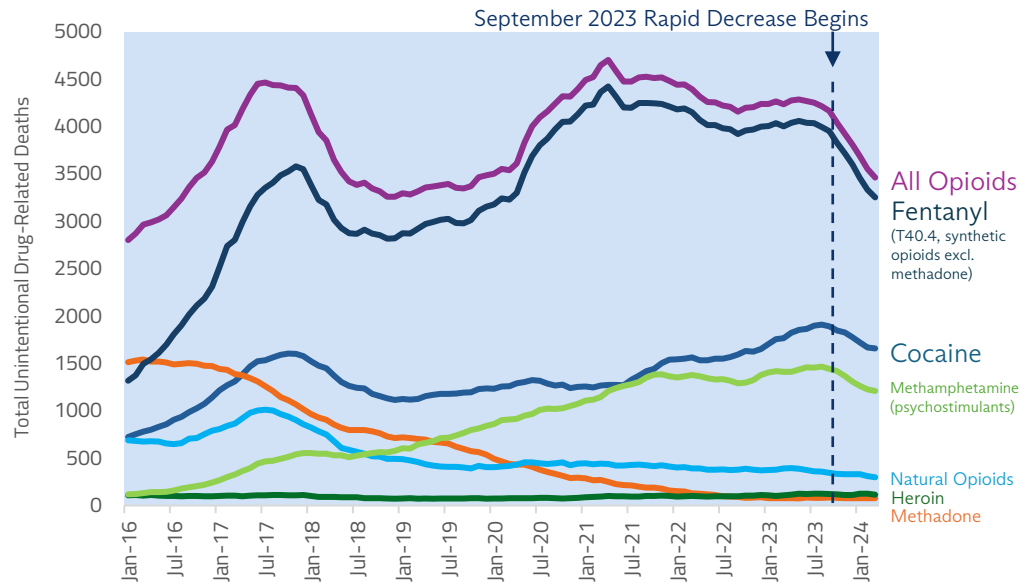


Fig. 1: Ohio Drug Overdose Deaths Over Time by Drug Type Using CDC NVSS Predicted Values

Fentanyl and cocaine use—whether intentional or unintentional—is a significant public health concern, with **Ohio's Non-Hispanic Black population experiencing an overdose death rate more than double** the overdose death rates of the Non-Hispanic White and Hispanic populations (Fig. 3).

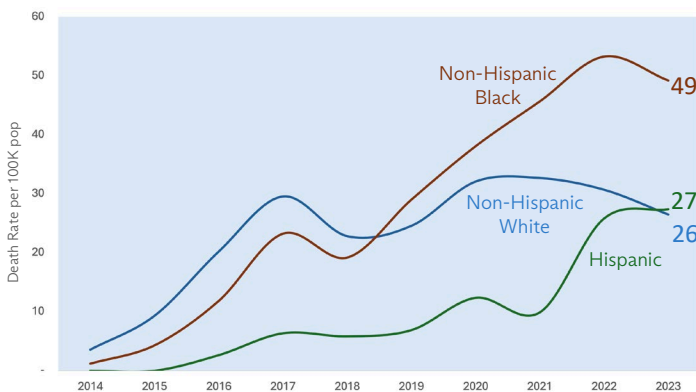


Fig. 2: Fentanyl Overdose Death Rates by Race/Ethnicity for Ohio Residents, 2014-2023

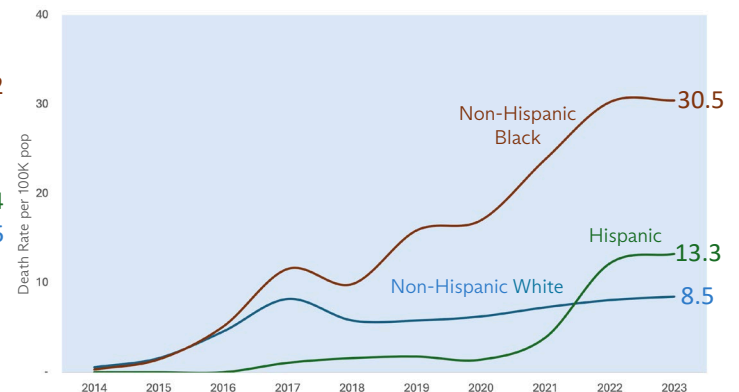


Fig. 3: Fentanyl and Cocaine Involved Overdose Death Rates by Race/Ethnicity for Ohio Residents, 2014-2023

Figure 2 shows fentanyl overdose death rates in Ohio from 2014 to 2023, highlighting trends among the three largest racial/ethnic groups, which together make up 98.8% of the state's population. Fentanyl, the primary synthetic opioid driving mortality, caused a sharp rise in deaths starting in 2016. In 2019 non-Hispanic Black fentanyl-involved death rates surpassed non-Hispanic White rates for the first time and have remained significantly higher through 2023. Although rates are now declining for these populations, the non-Hispanic Black death rate remains nearly double that of White and Hispanic populations.

Since 2016, the contamination, adulteration, or combined use of fentanyl with stimulant drugs like cocaine has driven sharp increases in overdose fatalities, with rates continuing to rise over time. Non-Hispanic Black populations in Ohio not only experience the highest overall overdose death rates but are disproportionately affected when both fentanyl and cocaine are involved (Fig. 3). This alarming disparity underscores the need for further research to improve understanding of its causes and an urgent focus on culturally tailored education, harm reduction, treatment, and other services and resources for the non-Hispanic Black population.

Data Sources: Fig 1 utilizes [CDC Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts](#); Fig's 2 and 3 utilize the [Data Ohio Portal ODH Mortality Dataset](#) combined with 2022 and 2023 counts by race/ethnicity and specific drug-type(s) from the Ohio Department of Health [2023 Ohio Unintentional Drug Overdose Report](#). Funding Acknowledgement: This data brief was supported by grant, #15PBJA-22-GG-04436-COAP, awarded to the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board of Cuyahoga County and funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Bureau of Justice Assistance or the ADAMHS Board.

