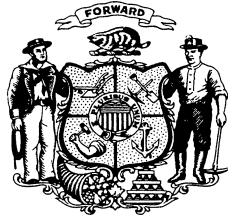


# STATE OF WISCONSIN

SENATE CHAIR  
**Howard Marklein**

316 East, State Capitol  
P.O. Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707-7882  
Phone: (608) 266-0703



ASSEMBLY CHAIR  
**Mark Born**

308 East, State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708-8953  
Phone: (608) 237-9137

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

### MEMORANDUM

To: Members  
Joint Committee on Finance

From: Senator Howard Marklein  
Representative Mark Born

Date: January 31, 2025

Re: DOA Report to JFC

Attached is a summary report on opioid and methamphetamine use in Wisconsin from the Department of Administration, pursuant to s. 153.89, Stats.

This report is being provided for your information only. No action by the Committee is required. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Attachments

HM:MB:jm

Joint Finance Committee  
Received Jan 31 2025

# **Summary: Opioid and Methamphetamine Use in Wisconsin**

January 2025

In March of 2022, Governor Evers signed 2021 Senate Bill 49 into law as 2021 Wisconsin Act 181. The act requires the Department of Administration (DOA), with the Department of Health Services (DHS), the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Department of Corrections (DOC), and the Department of Justice (DOJ), to “establish and maintain an opioid and methamphetamine data system to collect, format, analyze, and disseminate information on opioid and methamphetamine use.”

Act 181 directs DOA and its partner agencies to submit the proposed request for proposal (RFP) for the development of such a data system to the Joint Committee on Finance for review, provides up to \$1.5 million to support the data system’s development, and requires DOA to submit an annual report summarizing the information gathered from the new data system and analyzing data trends. The RFP process was completed on November 6, 2024, and DOA is leading a contract negotiation with the awarded vendor, The Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care. As the vendor has recently been selected, the data system does not yet exist. In the spirit of Act 181, this whitepaper provides an update on the relevant data as last reported in 2023.

The overdose crisis continues to evolve nationwide.<sup>2</sup> Since 2023, synthetic opioids (e.g., fentanyl) alone or mixed with other substances have driven the rate of overdose deaths in Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> Act 181 identifies more than 20 data elements that together formulate a more complete picture of its impact in Wisconsin. Yet, just as substance use itself is rife with complexities and nuance, so are the myriad data sources that inform our understanding of the impact of the overdose crisis on Wisconsinites. Importantly, much of the reported data originates from data sources intended for other purposes (e.g., patient records). For example, an individual who experiences an overdose but does not encounter first responders will not be represented in this data. Thus, readers of this whitepaper should take note of this overarching caveat and consider its implications with respect to equitable, data-driven decision-making.

## Most overdose deaths in Wisconsin involve synthetic opioids

In 2023, nearly 1,800 Wisconsinites died of a drug overdose.<sup>1</sup> Although still too high, this was a decrease from the 1830 deaths in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Most of these overdose deaths—80% in 2023 involved opioids such as fentanyl, oxycodone, or heroin (Figure 2).

While fentanyl is a synthetic opioid approved in the United States for managing severe pain, most recent cases of opioid-involved drug overdose deaths in the United States are linked to synthetic opioids.<sup>2</sup> In Wisconsin, more than 90% of opioid overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids in 2023 (Figure 2).

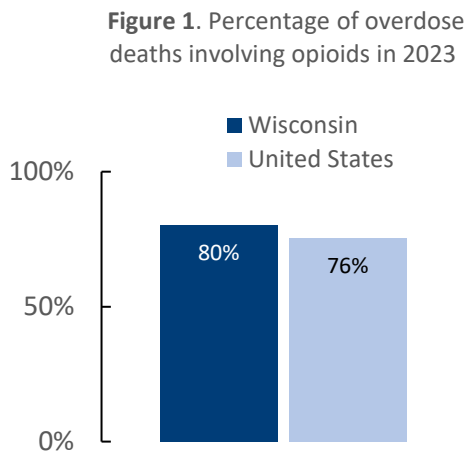


Figure 1. Opioids continue to be represented among the majority of overdose death in Wisconsin and nationwide.

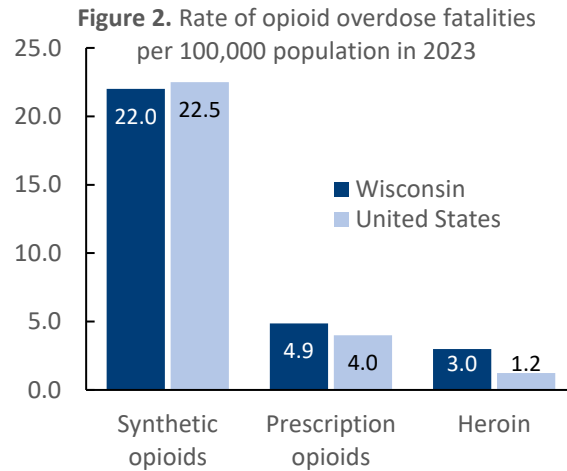


Figure 2. Recently, overdose deaths are dominated by high rates of synthetic opioid overdoses.<sup>1,2</sup>

## Fatal overdoses often involve more than one substance

In recent years, Wisconsin has seen a rise in overdose deaths involving more than one substance. Polysubstance overdoses most frequently involve opioids and stimulants, such as cocaine or methamphetamine. This is notable because while opioid overdoses are significantly more common than stimulant overdoses, rates of overdose involving *both* substances continue to grow faster than those involving either drug alone.<sup>1</sup> Of the 1,413 opioid overdose deaths in 2023 (down from 1464 in 2022), more than 50% included cocaine or a psychostimulant.

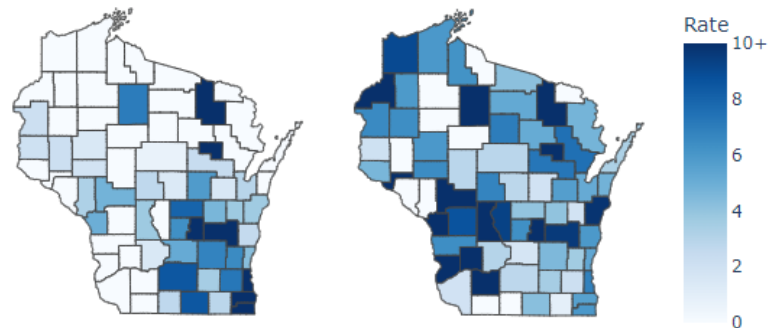


Figure 3. The rate of fatal opioid overdoses involving cocaine (left) or psychostimulants (right) in 2023 varies by county.<sup>1</sup>

The type of stimulant most involved in polysubstance overdoses varies by region. For example, psychostimulants such as methamphetamine are more likely to be involved in opioid overdose deaths in the Northern and Western regions of the state (where average death rate of 3.9 per 100,000 since 2015 is 80% higher than the rate of 2.1 the Southeast Region) (Figure 3, right), while cocaine is almost 10 times more likely to be found in combination with opioids the Southeastern region than in the Northern or Western Regions (Figure 3, left).<sup>1</sup>

## Rates of non-fatal overdose in Wisconsin emergency departments are below national rates

Hospital discharge data provide insight into non-fatal overdose statistics in Wisconsin (Figure 4).<sup>3</sup> Critically, these data only represent individuals who experienced an overdose and visited the hospital, and do not include individuals who recovered from an overdose prior to receiving formal medical treatment, or those who refused transport to medical facilities by emergency medical services (an estimated 10% of ambulance runs for overdose in WI<sup>4</sup>). The rate of hospitalizations for non-fatal overdose involving any substance changed by less than 5% between 2022 to 2023 in Wisconsin<sup>3</sup> and nationwide.<sup>5</sup>

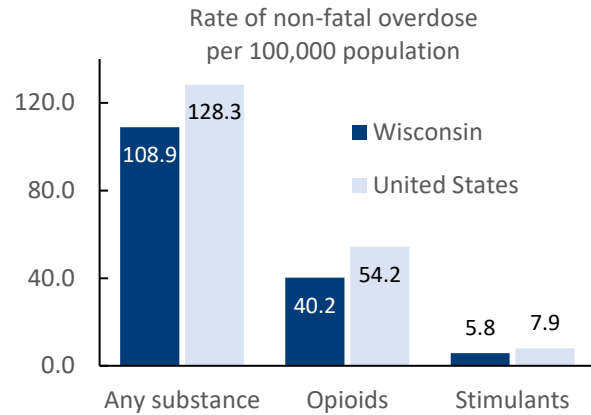


Figure 4. Rates of non-fatal overdoses encountered in Wisconsin emergency departments are lower than the national average.<sup>3,5</sup>

## Fatal overdoses affect different populations disproportionately in Wisconsin

Some demographic groups are more heavily impacted by the overdose crisis than others, and demographic disparities have increased in recent years<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, rates of fatal opioid overdose are higher among males and among individuals of Black or American Indian racial groups in both Wisconsin<sup>1</sup> (Figure 5) and nationwide<sup>6</sup>. In 2023, the rate among males was more than double that of females; the disparity in death rates between the Black or American Indian populations versus the statewide rate (24.4 deaths per 100,000 population) is even larger.

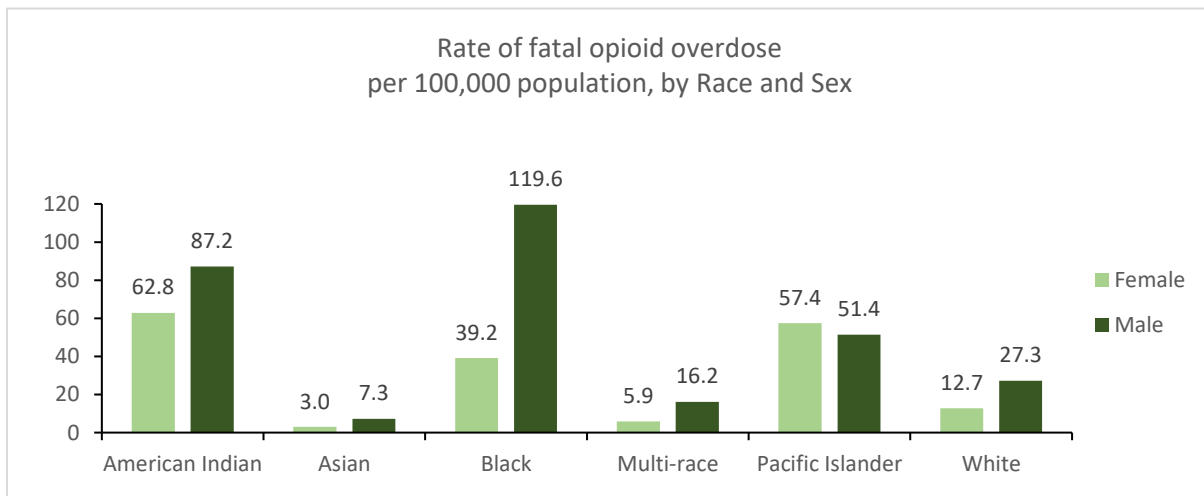


Figure 5. Rates of fatal opioid overdose disproportionately affected different demographic groups in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

## Treatment programs provide services for substance use disorder in Wisconsin

As of 2023, there were 26 brick and mortar Opioid Treatment Programs (OTPs; Table 1) and 5 Methamphetamine Treatment Centers operating in Wisconsin. Opioid Treatment Centers are certified under Wisconsin Admin. Code DHS § 75.59 and federally under 42 CFR Part 8. Medications administered at Wisconsin OTPs include methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone products, and Wisconsin OTPs provided services to 11,584 patients in 2023.<sup>7</sup>

### Opioid Treatment Programs in WI

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Acadia Healthcare                      | 13        |
| Addiction Medical Solutions            | 3         |
| Addiction Services and Pharmacotherapy | 3         |
| Community Medical Services             | 5         |
| Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center      | 1         |
| Psychological Addiction Services       | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>26</b> |

Table 1. Opioid treatment programs operating in Wisconsin in 2023, by owner/operator.<sup>7</sup>

## The opioid overdose reversal drug naloxone saves lives

Naloxone, an opioid overdose reversal drug, has saved countless lives in Wisconsin and nationwide. In 2020, the NARCAN® Direct Program began distributing NARCAN®, a nasal formulation of naloxone. The program, which leverages braided funding sources such as Wisconsin's share of the State Opioid Response grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and National Prescription Opiate Litigation Settlement funds, distributed 232,728 doses of NARCAN® in 2023.<sup>8</sup> Naloxone is also frequently distributed or administered as a life-saving medical treatment by adult correctional facilities, probation and parole offices, and emergency medical services (Table 2).

### Distribution of naloxone from select programs in WI

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| NARCAN orders reimbursed through Medicaid <sup>9</sup>                             | 24,178  |
| NARCAN® Direct Program distributions <sup>8</sup>                                  | 232,728 |
| DOC Division of Adult Institutions naloxone unit purchases <sup>10</sup>           | 1,954   |
| DOC Division of Community Corrections Office naloxone unit purchases <sup>11</sup> | 2,363   |
| Ambulance run doses administered <sup>12</sup>                                     | 9,134   |

Table 2. Doses of naloxone reimbursed, distributed, or administered by programs in Wisconsin in 2023. Units of naloxone contain two doses. Note: Due to changes in data management and query systems for some programs, data in this table should not be compared to previous years' reports.

## Citations

- <sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Vital Records Death Certificate Data.
- <sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts. Accessed January 25, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Wisconsin Hospital Association Information Center: Hospital Discharge Data from Emergency Department visits.
- <sup>4</sup> biospatial. Secure access via Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Wisconsin Ambulance Run Data System. Accessed January 31, 2024. <https://www.biospatial.io/>
- <sup>5</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Nonfatal Overdose Dashboards. Accessed January 17, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/dose-dashboard-nonfatal-surveillance-data.html>
- <sup>6</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States, 2001-2021. Accessed January 31, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db457.htm>
- <sup>7</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Report on Opioid Treatment Programs in Wisconsin. Accessed September 12, 2024. [2023 Calendar Year Report on Opioid Treatment Programs in Wisconsin](#)
- <sup>8</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. NARCAN® Direct Program order and shipment data.
- <sup>9</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Medicaid claims data.
- <sup>10</sup> Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Division of Adult Institutions - Naloxone unit purchase data.
- <sup>11</sup> Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Division of Community Corrections - Naloxone unit purchase data.
- <sup>12</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Wisconsin Ambulance Run Data System (WARDS).