

Heroin Use by San Diego County Arrestees

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States and around two in three (63%) overdoses were either due to prescription opioid painkillers or heroin in 2015.¹ Other recent national statistics have shown that about one in four (23%) of those who use heroin develop an opiate addiction¹ and that the economic cost of heroin drug use was around \$78.5 billion in 2013 dollars.² With parallel increases over the past two decades in the number of opiate prescriptions, drug treatment admissions, and drug overdose deaths, increased attention is being focused on how to address what many are now calling a public health emergency.³

The President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis⁴ recently released a draft report outlining a number of recommendations, including increasing treatment capacity, supporting prescriber education initiatives, making naloxone (to reverse overdoses) more readily available, enhancing information sharing, supporting research, funding enforcement (especially efforts related to fentanyl), and developing targeted and effective prevention messages. With this issue of national concern, this CJ Flash highlights statistics compiled in 2016 from the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM)⁵ program related to heroin and other opioid use by local arrestees.

91

*Americans die
nationally every
day from an
opiod overdose*

In 2016, 11 percent of adult arrestees were positive for opiates, with females significantly more likely to test positive (15%), compared to males (9%). These percentages were higher than in 2000, the baseline year for the project.

males

2000: 6%
2016: 9%

females

2000: 7%
2016: 15%

¹ <https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/opioid-addiction-disease-facts-figures.pdf>

² <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2017-opioids-infographics.pdf>

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/ondcp/commission-interim-report.pdf>

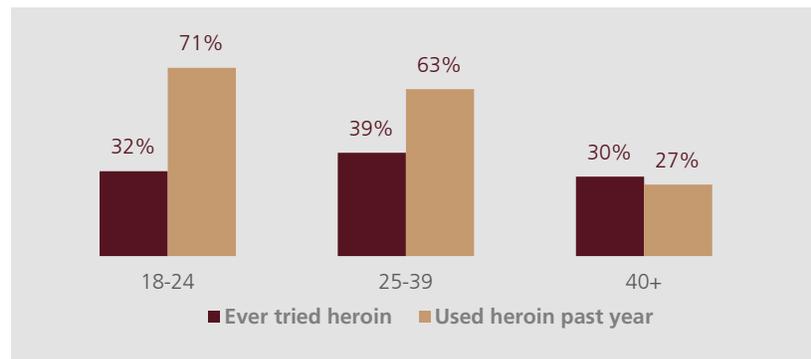
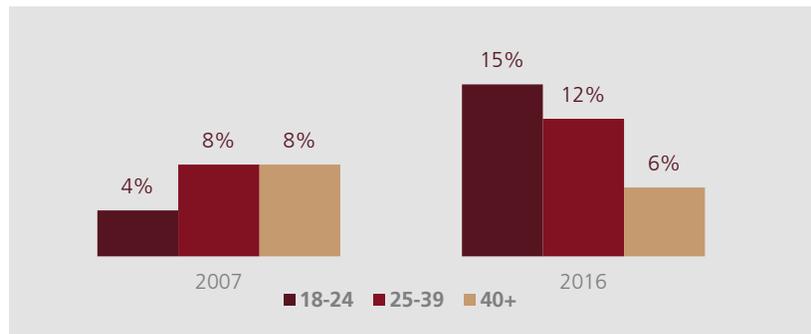
⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/presidents-commission>

⁵ More information regarding the SAM program is available on the SANDAG website:
<http://www.sandag.org/index.asp?classid=14&subclassid=15&projectid=73&fuseaction=projects.detail>

- 24** average age adult arrestees report they first tried heroin
- 18** average number of days in the last 30 arrestees who use heroin reported they used it
- 71** percent of arrestees who tested positive for opiates that were also positive for meth

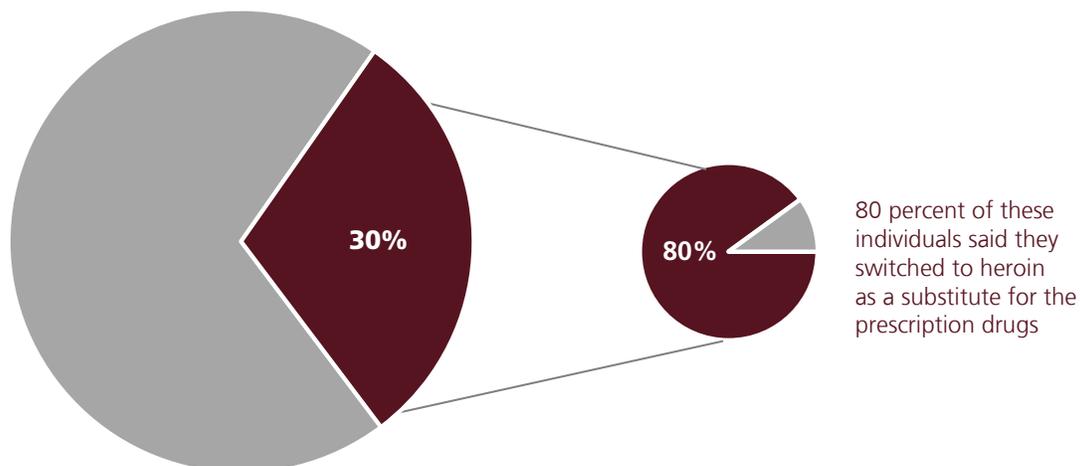
Changing demographics of those positive for opiates

While older arrestees historically were most likely to test positive for opiates, this pattern has changed over the past decade. In 2016, adult arrestees under 25 were most likely to test positive for opiates, compared to older arrestees (40 and older) and most likely of those who had tried heroin to report they had used it in the past year.



73 percent of arrestees who said heroin was **VERY EASY** or **EASY** to obtain in 2016

30 percent of arrestees who abused prescription opiates before trying heroin



46%

*of arrestees who ever tried heroin
said they had ever had to visit an emergency
room for a drug-related issue*

36%

*of arrestees who had tried heroin
said they ever had a drug overdose*

The most frequently
abused prescription
opiates that preceded
heroin use:

69%

OxyContin

41%

Vicodin

39%

Percocet

Summary: What we know about heroin and other opiate use from the 2016 adult SAM data

More adults interviewed are testing positive for opiates, especially females

Arrestees were more likely to report heroin was easier to obtain in 2016 than 2015

Younger adult arrestees are now more likely to use opiates than older arrestees

About 1 in 3 arrestees were hooked on prescription drugs prior to using heroin

The most commonly abused prescription opiates were OxyContin, Vicodin, and Percocet

Among the arrestee population in San Diego County, a large percentage (almost 3 in 4) use opiates and meth

Almost 1 in 2 of those who ever tried heroin reported they had been to the emergency room for a drug-related incident and 1 in 3 said they had ever overdosed