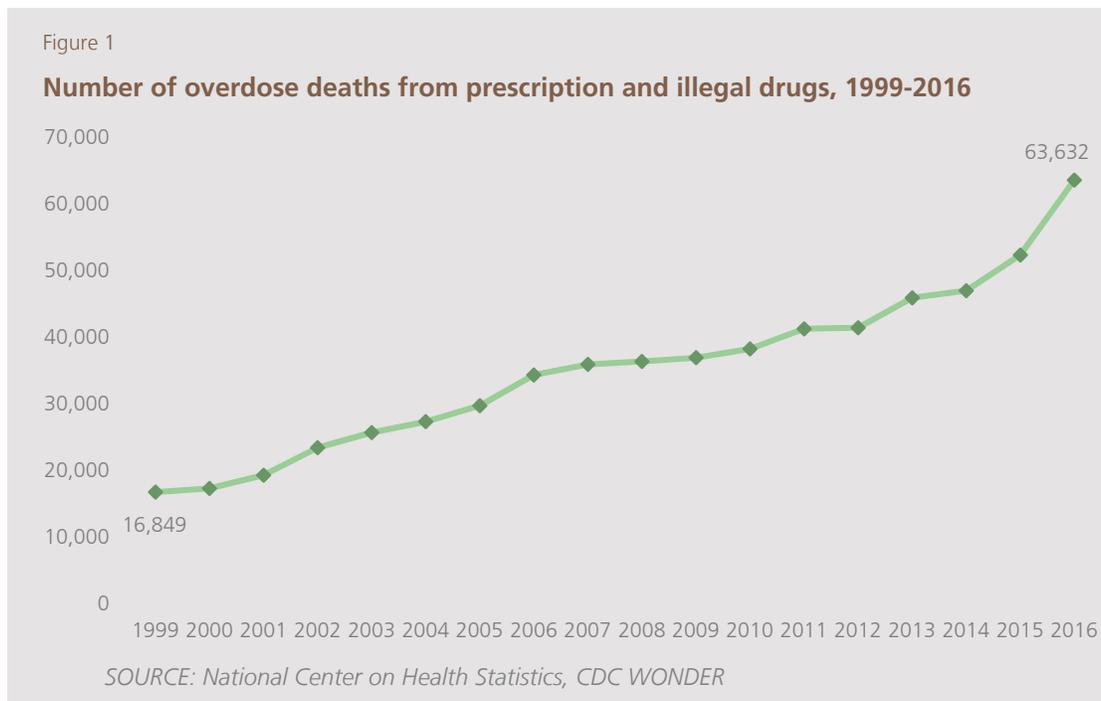


## Drug Overdoses Among San Diego County Arrestees

According to the most recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>1</sup>, there were 161,374 unintentional deaths in the United States in 2016, making it the third most common cause of death overall, and the number one cause of death for those under the age of 45. Of these unintentional deaths, the greatest number were attributed to poisoning (36% or 58,335), with the vast majority (94%) of these poisonings related to overdosing on prescription or illegal drugs. Beginning in 2011, the number of deaths from unintentional poisoning was higher than the number from unintentional motor vehicle traffic-related injuries<sup>2</sup>. In addition, as Figure 1 shows, since 1999, the number of drug overdose deaths (whether intentional or unintentional) has increased dramatically nationally, from 16,849 to 63,632 in 2016.



Number of drug overdose deaths in the U.S. up **278%** since 1999

What is behind this dramatic increase in drug overdose deaths? According to the CDC<sup>3</sup>, one driving factor has been the increases in the number of deaths from prescription opioids, related to the substantial increase in the prescribing of such drugs for chronic pain<sup>4</sup>. In addition to deaths, overdoses from both prescription and illicit drugs were responsible for parallel increases in nonfatal emergency department and hospital admissions (an estimated 259,665 hospitalizations for nonfatal, unintentional drug poisoning and 418,313 emergency department visits for nonfatal unintentional drug poisoning occurred in 2014).

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), National Vital Statistics System.  
<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). National Vital Statistics Reports, Deaths: Final Data for 2014. Volume 65, Number 4.  
<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017). Annual Surveillance Report of Drug-Related Risks and Outcomes – United States, 2017. Surveillance Special Report 1. Available on-line at <https://www.cdc.gov>  
<sup>4</sup> According to the CDC report, in 2016, prescribers wrote 66.5 opioid and 25.2 sedative prescriptions for every 100 Americans.

In 2016, 80 of the 488 adult arrestees interviewed in San Diego County as part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program reported that they had ever had a drug overdose – the equivalent of about 1 in every 6. With the increases in fatal and nonfatal overdoses nationally, this CJ Flash looks at some of the characteristics these individuals shared with a focus on what implications may be for prevention, education, and treatment, including targeting messages and outreach to those most likely to overdose, alerting intervention and treatment providers to factors possibly associated with risk, making treatment easily available to those who are identified as having overdosed, and ensuring other needs and risk factors are addressed during treatment.

- While not statistically significant, arrestees under 25 were more likely to report they had ever overdosed (20%), compared to older arrestees (15%). This larger rate is of practical interest given the possibility that the younger arrestees have used drugs for a shorter period of time. This trend is also consistent with higher opiate positive rates among younger arrestees in recent years, while the opposite used to be true (i.e., older arrestees tested positive at a higher rate).  
*1 in 5 arrestees under the age of 25 report ever overdosing.*
- Arrestees who self-identified as White were most likely to report having an overdose (25%), compared to those who identified as Hispanic (10%) or Black (8%). Overall, 70 percent of the 80 arrestees who reported overdosing identified as White.  
*White arrestees more likely to overdose.*
- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of those who reported an overdose had done so on heroin, 33 percent on another drug (prescription or designer/synthetic), 23 percent on meth, 9 percent on powder cocaine, and 1 percent on crack.  
*Arrestees most likely to overdose on heroin, but to test positive for meth at the time of the interview.*
- Almost three-quarters (71%) of those who had overdosed reported they had ever injected drugs, and 29 percent said they never had.  
*About 1 in 3 who had overdosed had never injected drugs.*
- Sixty-one percent (61%) of those who ever reported overdosing tested positive at the time of the interview for meth, 43 percent for marijuana, 23 percent for opiates, and 10 percent for cocaine.
- Arrestees who reported ever overdosing had other risk factors – they were more likely to have ever been homeless (88%), compared to those who had not ever overdosed (61%), been involved in the distribution of drugs (68% versus 38%), have a mental health diagnosis (55% versus 28%), tried to commit suicide (41% versus 14%), or been involved in prostitution/human trafficking (24% versus 12%).

*Of adult arrestees who reported having ever overdosed on drugs...*

**88%** had been or were currently homeless

**55%** have had a mental health diagnosis

**41%** have tried to commit suicide

**24%** have been involved in prostitution/human trafficking

- About three in five (61%) had ever received drug treatment before – 39 percent had not.

*Almost 2 in 5 of arrestees who had overdosed had never received drug treatment.*