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Key Findings:

- 1) Fatal overdoses are rising at an unprecedented rate in the State of California, and in Santa Barbara County.
 - a. Fatal overdoses reached over 106,000 in the United States for the period between November 2020 and November 2021, a 16% increase from the same time period in 2019-2020. This equals approximately 8,904 deaths a month, and 293 a day.
 - b. In the state of California, there were 11,704 overdose deaths between December 2020 and December 2021, a 22% increase in the same time period in 2019-2020, and a 79% increase since 2019. This equals over 975 overdose deaths a month, and over 32 a day.
 - c. Preliminary numbers show that in Santa Barbara County there were over 133 overdose deaths between January 2021 and January 2022.
- 2) Fentanyl has changed the game in California and is fueling the overdose epidemic in our community.
 - a. In the state of California, fentanyl was listed as the cause of death in 77% of drug overdose deaths in 2020, and deaths caused by fentanyl increased by 146% (2,343 more than 2019)
 - b. Fentanyl involved deaths in Santa Barbara County have increased 81% since 2019.
 - c. Fentanyl was present in the body of 50.4% of the drug overdose deaths in Santa Barbara County in 2021.
- 3) Santa Barbara residents are taking mixed illicit drugs, most combined with fentanyl knowingly or unknowingly, with deadly results.
 - a. Of the 133 overdose deaths that occurred in Santa Barbara between January 2020 and January 2021, 7.5% were solely caused by fentanyl, 0.8% by cocaine, and 3% by ethanol (alcohol).
 - b. Of the 67 deaths that were associated with fentanyl during this 12-month period, 57 co-occurred with various other substances, including cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and alcohol.
 - c. Mixing fentanyl with other drugs increases the potency and potential for overdose and death.
- 4) Overdose deaths among Hispanics are growing at a higher rate than other subsets of the population.
 - a. In 2021, 36% of the overdose deaths in Santa Barbara County were in the Hispanic population, while 57% were among the White population.
 - b. Overdose deaths in the Hispanic population have increased about 114% (22 to 47) between 2019 and 2021, while White overdose deaths have increased 17% (65 to 76) during this same time.

Introduction:

The opioid epidemic as we know it has changed radically since the Centers for Disease Control first declared it a public health emergency in 2017 and enacted several measures to reduce the overprescribing of opioids to the American public. At that time, over 40% of the 70,237 overdose deaths involved a prescription opioid and 191 million prescriptions were dispensed to American patients¹.

Fast forward to 2021, where we were living in the post-pandemic world. The prescribing of opioids was at an all-time low, only 142,816,781 prescriptions for opioids were dispensed in 2020, but we are still living with the ramifications of this public health crisis. In 2020, we saw an unprecedented amount of overdose deaths in the US, an astonishing increase of 33% to 93,331 Americans, since that public health emergency was declared, yet these deaths look different². More individuals are dying with multiple drugs in their systems, proportionately fewer with prescription opioids, a

dramatic increase in the number of individuals dying from illicit fentanyl, and the demographics of those overdosing and dying has also shifted.

The purpose of this report is to investigate what is driving this unprecedented increase in overdose deaths and determine why so many people are still dying at the hands of illicit drugs. We will seek to answer the following questions to determine what is happening in the state of California and Santa Barbara County and make recommendations as to what leaders can do to reverse this deadly trend.

- 1) What is the opioid crisis and how did we get here?
- 2) How common is opioid use disorder in the state of California and our community? How has this changed in the last three years?
- 3) Is the face of the overdose crisis changing?
- 4) Which drugs are killing people in the state of California and our community?
- 5) What is fentanyl and how is it impacting the state of California and our community?

Methodology:

There are several methods and resources available to track overdose data at the national, state, and county level and, while all these data sets rarely agree down to the number, each represents an important aspect of the overdose crisis. Therefore, several different reporting agencies, as well as original data were used to compile these results. It is important to note that while the exact numbers may not always align, the trends represented by each of these reports are essential to understanding the changing nature of the overdose crisis in California.

- Center for Disease Control - Reports overdose deaths from their Vital Statistics Reporting System (stemming from death certificates) for 12-month periods. These are classified according to the decedent's county of residence and the month in which the death occurred.
- California Department of Public Health CDPH - Reports overdose deaths from Coroner's Offices and Medical Examiner's offices from all 58 counties in the state of California. Includes demographic as well as toxicology results indicating the types of drugs in decedents.
- Santa Barbara County Coroner Overdose Data - Uses data from the Santa Barbara County Coroner's Office. When a fatal overdose is recorded, the Coroner's Office staff updates the database to reflect the nature of the toxicity.

Information to answer these research questions was drawn from peer-reviewed research, databases, research reports, and news articles. The data used for the July-December 2020, and January-June 2021 county-level analysis was provided by the Santa Barbara Sheriff Coroner's Office in this needs assessment. Data was also obtained from the State of California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and specifically, their California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard. Additional data and information came from the Santa Barbara Opioid Coalition, Santa Barbara Public Health, and the DEA. CDC data is vital to the compilation of this report.

Geographic Region:

The scope of this report includes an analysis of the overdose crisis in the state of California, as well as a deep dive into the Santa Barbara County community. According to the 2020 US Census, California is the largest state in the country with over 39.5 million residents that is growing in both size and racial and ethnic diversity³. California's race and ethnic breakdown is 39% Latino, 35% White, 15% Asian American, and 5% Black³. The 2020 California poverty rate is 11.5% of the population, which is almost equal to the US poverty rate of 11.4%³.

Santa Barbara County comprises approximately 448 thousand residents and covers over 2,735 square miles and consists of eight cities³. The two largest cities are the City of Santa Maria with over 109 thousand residents and the City of Santa Barbara with over 91 thousand residents³. The City of Santa Maria also has the highest proportion of Hispanic residents, consisting of 76.7% of the population.

	Santa Barbara County	California
Population	448,229	39,538,223
Percentage White	43.8%	36.5%
Percentage Black	2.4%	6.5%
Percentage Hispanic	46%	39.4%
Percentage Asian	6%	15.5%
Percentage Male	50%	49.7%
Poverty Rate	10.5%	11.5%

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What is the opioid crisis and how did we get here?

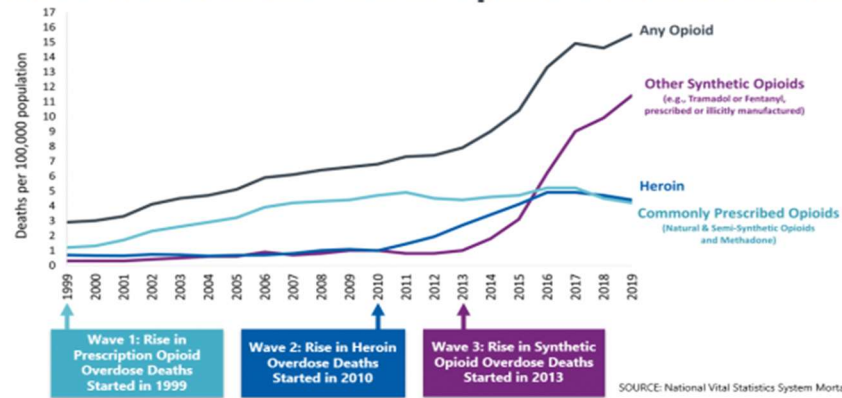
The opioid crisis or opioid epidemic as it is often termed is a blanket statement used to refer to the growing number of drug overdoses and deaths from prescription and illicit opioids. The number of people dying from accidental opioid overdose is substantially higher than overdoses from all other drugs combined because of the way opioids work on the brain. In 2020, over 255 Americans died each day from a drug overdose, mostly caused by opioids, making this epidemic a true public health emergency. However, we did not arrive at these numbers overnight, rather the opioid epidemic has been growing since the 1990s and, many believe, was accelerated by the pandemic.

The CDC and public health experts generally divide the opioid epidemic, which has claimed the lives of nearly a million people since 1999, into 3 “waves.”⁴ The first wave was driven by the over prescription of opioid medications after drug companies pushed pills into pharmacies and doctors’ offices in the late 1990s. This overprescribing created what was commonly known as “pill mills”, where unethical doctors fed the opioid addiction of millions of Americans with tragic results. In the wake of an onslaught of overdose deaths in the 2000s, policymakers adopted a multi-pronged approach to decrease the supply of prescription opioids in the market. These changes in both prescribing and dispensing caused a sharp decline in the number of prescriptions for opioids that were being filled in the US and soon these drugs became much harder to obtain.

In 2010, as prescription opioids were becoming less and less common on the streets, the United States saw an increase in deaths caused by another opioid, heroin⁴. This increase in deaths, known as the second wave of the opioid crisis, marked a move for many from substances obtained from a pharmacy to those obtained on the street. Because of this shift, the second wave quickly gave way to the third wave of the crisis, the rise of synthetic opioids in 2013⁴. This wave is marked by the emergence of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, which is 80-100 times stronger than morphine. Some public health experts now believe that the United States has passed into a “fourth wave,” driven by polysubstance use and fentanyl-laced drugs such as cocaine, counterfeit benzodiazepines and painkillers, and methamphetamine⁶.



Three Waves of the Rise in Opioid Overdose Deaths



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How common is opioid use in the state of California and Santa Barbara County five years ago and now?

Opioid Use in California

The Current State of Fatal Overdoses in California

Since the days of the pill mills, California has been at the center of the overdose crisis and that trend has continued into 2020, when California ranked highest in the nation for overdose deaths⁷. According to the CDC, in 2020, 9,538 Californians died from a drug overdose. This represents a 54% increase in deaths from the previous year and the continuation of a trend that was already in place before the pandemic. While overdoses increased dramatically during the pandemic, they began 2020 at a higher level than 2019, even in the first two and a half months before the onset of the pandemic. Overdoses remained high throughout the rest of 2020 and into 2021, when 11,704 people died of a drug overdose. Overdoses are expected to continue to rise into 2022. The vast majority of these cases had more than one drug present in the body at the time of death, indicating a crisis that is not just growing, but becoming more complex.

A Historical Perspective of Fatal Overdoses in California

Over the last five years, overdose deaths in California have continued to rise at an unprecedented pace. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), between January 2015 and January 2016, there were 3,324 overdose deaths in the state of California². In 2021, that number jumped to 7,661, an unbelievable 130% increase in a five-year time period². Overdose trends have been trending upward since 2015 when approximately 277 Californians died of a drug overdose each month. It is estimated that during 2020, approximately 767 Californians died each month, or 25 a day from a drug overdose, most likely from an opioid⁹.

Fatal Overdoses in Santa Barbara County

Much like the state of California, fatal overdoses from drugs such as fentanyl, cocaine, and heroin continue to plague Santa Barbara County. According to the Santa Barbara Sheriff Coroner's Office, overdoses in Santa Barbara County rose 17% from January 2020 to December 2021, in comparison to the 60% rise in the state of California during this same period^{2,8}.

These same trends hold true when evaluating drug overdose deaths at the city level in Santa Barbara County. As previously mentioned, Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Lompoc, Guadalupe, Solvang, Buellton, and Carpinteria cities vary significantly in population size. In the 12-month period ending December 2021, Santa Barbara City had the highest

overdose death rate at 37 individuals, followed by Santa Maria at 28 individuals, and then Lompoc also with 28 individuals⁸.

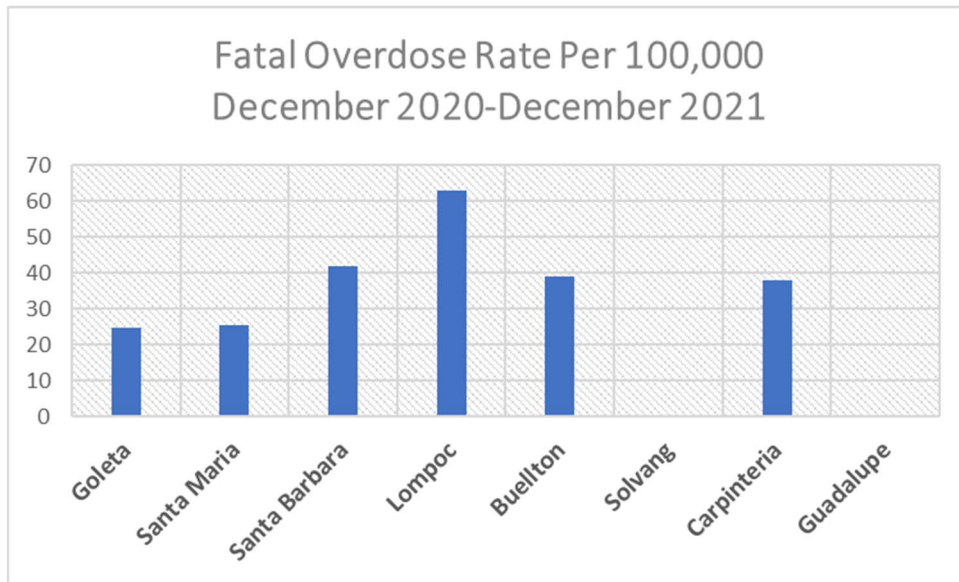
Santa Barbara County

When the geographic scope of Santa Barbara County is expanded, additional variations in fatal overdose deaths as reported by the CDC emerge. In particular, the rate of overdose deaths per 100,000 of the population for the City of Lompoc is the highest in the region, at approximately 63 individuals per 100,000, followed by the City of Santa Barbara at 41.7 per 100,000. An analysis of the overdose deaths in these cities using the Coroner’s Office data for 2021 indicates that fentanyl is a driving force in these cities overdose fatalities^{3,8}.

Fatal Overdoses December 2020-December 2021

City	December 2020	December 2021	Population	December 2021 Rate Per 100,000
Santa Maria	22	28	109,707	25.5
Santa Barbara	31	37	88,665	41.7
Lompoc	22	28	44,444	63
Buellton	3	2	5,138	38.9
Solvang	0	0	6,126	0
Carpinteria	3	5	13,232	37.8
Guadalupe	1	0	8,293	0
Goleta	5	8	32,690	24.5
Total	87	108	308,295	35

3,8

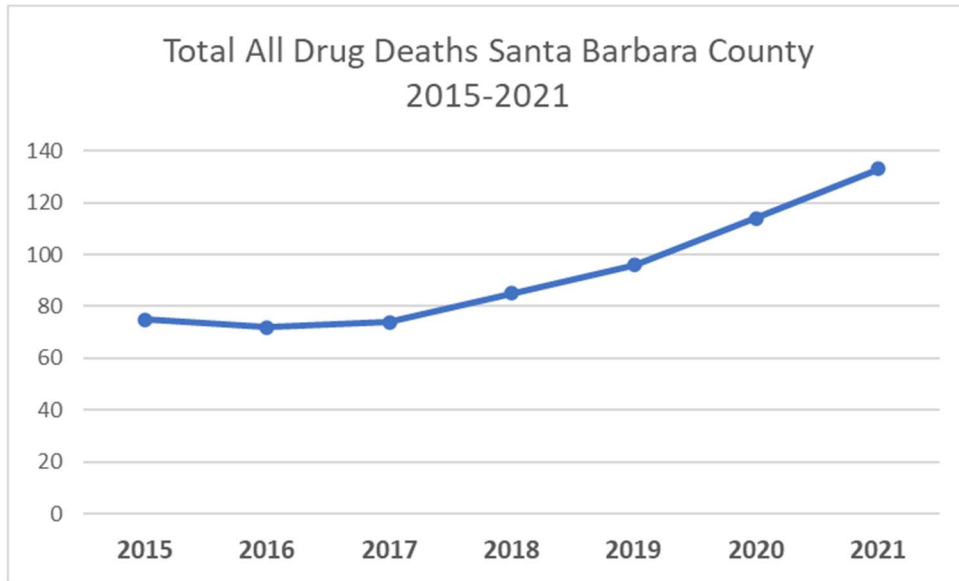


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A Historical Perspective of Fatal Overdoses in Santa Barbara County

Using the data from the Santa Barbara Sheriff Coroner’s office we can evaluate the ways in which the overdose crisis has changed in Santa Barbara from 2015 to 2021⁸. This longitudinal analysis of the data shows a similar pattern to the state of California. A decrease in overdose deaths occurred from 2016 to 2017 in this region, followed by a sharp increase with an 84.7% increase in overdose deaths during this time period⁸.





Prevalence of Substance Use Disorder

The California Health Care Foundation used a combination of the National Survey on Drug Abuse and Health (NSDAH) and population estimates to determine the prevalence of substance use disorder in the state of California. This analysis estimates that over 8.8% of Californians have inappropriately used a pain medication or an addictive substance between 2018-2019. This looks at the population of age 12 and over of the state of California¹⁰.

SUD Prevalence*		
CALIFORNIA, ANNUAL AVERAGE, 2018-19	IN 1,000s	% OF POP
Any Substance	2,915	8.8%
Alcohol	2,079	6.3%
Illicit Drugs	1,204	3.6%
Pain Medication	192	0.6%

* Age 12 and over

Is the face of the overdose crisis changing?

Fatal Overdoses in California

In 2015 (used for comparative purposes), 4,615 Californians died of an overdose⁹. This loss of life was primarily in the White community (67%), among males (63%), between the ages of 25 and 44 (31%)⁹. These fatal overdoses



represent a similar pattern that was seen across the US during the first three waves of the opioid epidemic. However, in recent years, as we potentially enter the fourth wave of the epidemic, marked by fentanyl analogs, we are seeing a shift in the demographics of those that are being impacted by this crisis¹⁷.

In 2020, there were 8,894 overdose deaths in the state of California, and while many of the demographic trends hold true, there is a shift in who is dying from drug overdoses⁹. While the majority of overdose deaths in the state of California continue to be among the White population (54%), there is a disproportionate increase among the Hispanic population (200%, 867 to 2,604)^{3,9}.

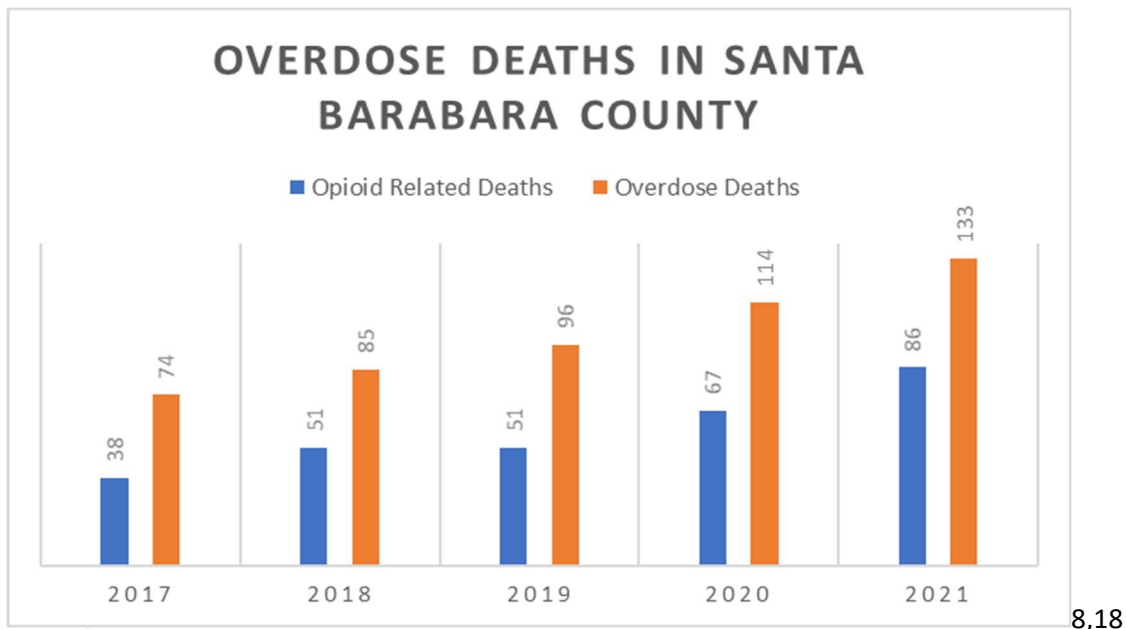
There has also been a subtle shift in the gender of overdose victims in the state of California in the last five years. In 2015, 67% of those dying from an overdose were men, and 33% were women⁹. In 2020, we see that demographic trend shift slightly to a more male-dominated issue with 74% of the decedents being men⁹. Again, if you look at the percent change among men during this time frame, 127% (2,909 to 6,590), it slightly outpaces the total increase in overdoses in California⁹.

Fatal Overdoses in Santa Barbara County

Santa Barbara County has not been spared the proliferation of fentanyl. Fentanyl is now present in many of the toxicology results of overdoses in Santa Barbara County as of 2020^{8,9}. What began in 2015 as a minor component of the overdose crisis is now by far the driver of the vast majority of opioid and all other overdoses in Santa Barbara. Fentanyl related overdoses are up 200% since 2015 in Santa Barbara^{8,9}. In fact, heroin as a cause of death, once the main drug driving overdoses up, is down from previous highs, even while fentanyl drives overdoses to record highs^{8,9}.

Another trend similar to the statewide trend is the gender gap in overdoses. In 2021, about 73% of overdoses were male^{8,9}. This reveals a stark reality in the victim profile of drug decedents. Males are 3-4 times more likely of dying from an overdose than females.

Overall, the face of someone who has died of a drug overdose in Santa Barbara County in 2020 is likely to be a White male, slightly younger, and much more likely to be a fentanyl victim. There has been a death rate increase of 34.3% in California among the Latino community from 2019 – 2020 with one of the primary causes of death being an overdose²⁰. In Santa Barbara County, this increase is much higher (59%)during the same time period⁸.

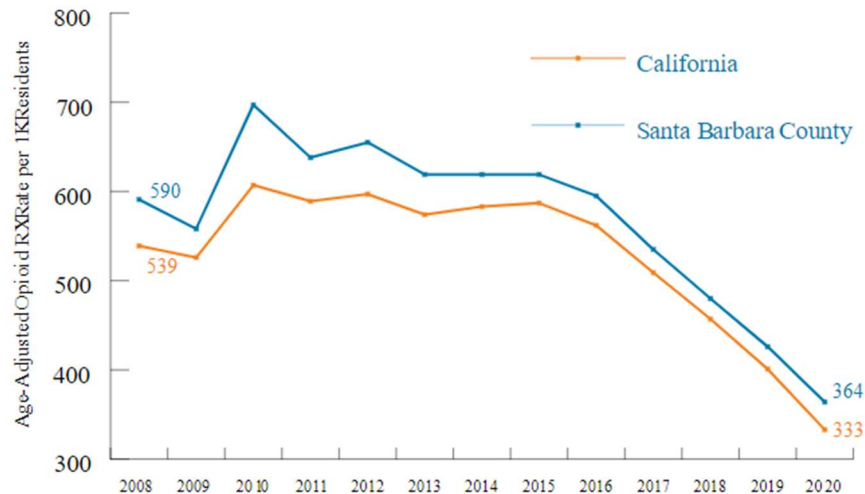


Which drugs are most impacting the state of California and our community?

Prescribing Trends in California

Since 2016, the rate of opioid prescriptions began to decline, which has been reducing the number of prescription opioids that reach the street and reducing the number of prescription opioid deaths¹⁸.

Prescribing for prescription opioids in the state of California is at an all-time low¹⁸. However, the overdose death rate in the state of California continues to climb⁹.



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What drugs are killing people in California?

Across the board, not only in the state of California but across the country, prescribing opioids is down, as are deaths that are attributed to prescription opioids^{2,11,18}. In early 2015, prescription opioids were cited as the cause of death in 30% of the individuals that died of an overdose in the state of California⁹. In 2020, that number dropped to just 13%⁹. Heroin has a similar trend, dropping from 13% of deaths to 11%. So what is killing Californians? The emergence of illicit fentanyl marked a dramatic shift in the overdose crisis in California. Each year since 2015, the number of deaths caused by fentanyl has increased from 3% in 2015 to 44% in 2020, marking an overall increase of 187% during this time⁹.

What drugs are killing people in Santa Barbara County?

In Santa Barbara County, fentanyl was found as contributive to the cause of death in 50.4% of the cases (67), while the second highest was methamphetamine at 60 deaths in 2021^{8,9}. In Santa Barbara County 41 of 133 individuals died with only one drug in their system, 69% of deaths had more than one drug as the cause^{8,9}.

The data clearly shows that fentanyl is drastically increasing its presence when it comes to drug overdoses in Santa Barbara County. The change from 2015-2021 is so large it's hard to imagine. Even overdoses that involve other drugs often still have fentanyl involved in the cause of death. The pervasiveness of fentanyl in the drug supply makes people who believe they are consuming other drugs, such as powder cocaine and heroin, unsuspecting victims of fentanyl. Sometimes a dealer will add fentanyl to their drugs to have a "unique" product, one that produces a different high than cocaine or methamphetamine alone. Even in these cases, the users may not know there is fentanyl in their supply, even if not in a lethal amount. Although the number of non-fatal overdoses cannot be accurately measured in

their entirety, there are many more non-fatal overdoses than fatal overdoses. When a chart shows fentanyl deaths being up, the actual number of non-fatal overdoses is likely up more.

What is Fentanyl?

Illicit Fentanyl

Strength

The average amount of naloxone needed to reverse a fentanyl overdose is 3.6mg, meaning that 2 doses of the commonly available naloxone delivery method Narcan are often needed¹². Most deaths due to fentanyl are the result of powerful illicitly made fentanyl, often of unknown strength. Generally, the strength of fentanyl is 80-100x that of morphine and about 50x that of heroin¹³. 2-3mg of fentanyl is sufficient to kill the average adult male, while the equivalent dose of heroin is 30mg^{14,15}. The weight of a lethal dose of fentanyl is equivalent to 3 grains of sugar¹⁵.

History

Prior to the widespread proliferation of illegally manufactured fentanyl around 2016, fentanyl primarily came from a singular laboratory in Mexico¹². It was shut down in Toluca, Mexico and prevented an earlier surge in illicit fentanyl deaths. Authorities in the mid-2000s realized that fentanyl, due to its potency, was easily smuggled and created compared to heroin because of the small space required for mass production and the low weight of high doses.

It is also important to note that fentanyl is a purely synthetic opioid¹⁶. It is completely manmade and does not require any plant cultivation, making the space required for mass-producing the drug much smaller than heroin¹⁶. Crude “laboratories” are capable of mass-producing kilograms of potent, deadly powder that can be used to cut other substances¹⁶. The ingredients for producing this fentanyl are dropped off boats from China and picked up by cartels that manufacture and smuggle the drug¹⁶. Some ingredients come from India and other south Asian countries, but the main route is through Mexico via China^{16,19}.

The word laboratory does not truly represent how crude the production of fentanyl is¹⁶. While the production of methamphetamine is dangerous and requires knowledge of chemistry, fentanyl is easily made by anyone. Fentanyl can be produced in impure barrels with these ingredients received in the ocean off the coast of Mexico and brought to the cooking sites¹⁶. Due to the small amount needed to make a large profit and the fact that cartels ship fentanyl in many small shipments into the United States, stopping the flow of fentanyl is nearly impossible¹⁹. Even a large seizure of fentanyl does not concern cartels because they spread out their shipments into many smaller sizes¹⁹.

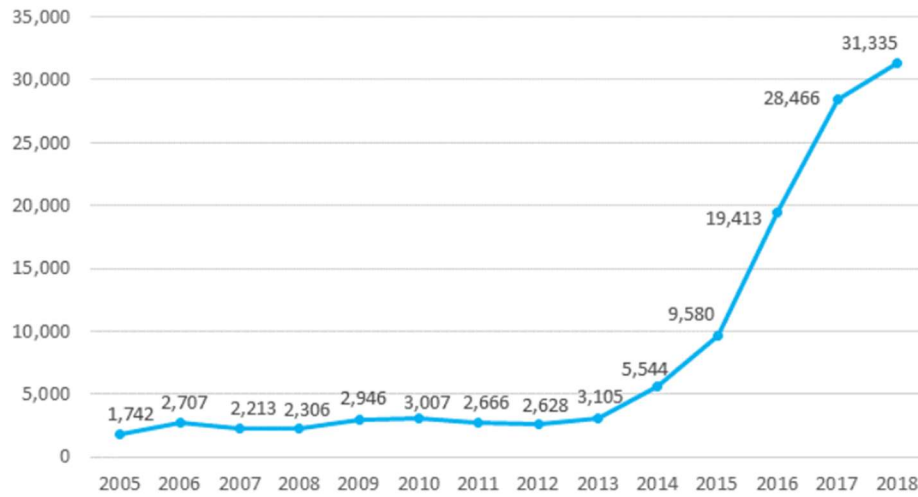
Usage

The strength of fentanyl and its analogues, along with its ability to be easily smuggled and produced, is not lost on international cartels or local dealers¹⁹. A large portion of street drugs are now cut with fentanyl¹⁴. The result is heroin contaminated with fentanyl sold by dealers to increase profit by reducing volume and increasing and shortening the euphoric effects, leading to more purchases, a stronger high and increased danger. Dealers often do not precisely measure the amount of fentanyl in the heroin they sell to people, who think they are simply buying heroin. When this happens, a heroin user may nearly instantly die from the fentanyl present in the heroin because they believe they are using uncut heroin and use a higher than anticipated dose of synthetic opioids. Fentanyl and heroin look identical and therefore heroin is very easy to cut with fentanyl¹⁴.

According to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment report published in March 2021, the rate of pure heroin overdoses has decreased by almost 20% across the nation between 2017 – 2018. Heroin overdoses in combination with fentanyl increased by 12% during the same time period¹⁹. The DEA’s report also shows that there is a rapid increase in synthetic opioid deaths including fentanyl. These synthetic opioids were involved

in more than 31,000 overdose deaths and accounted for 67% of opioid-involved deaths. This trend shows the increased potency of fentanyl compared to heroin, and that people are moving to injecting pure fentanyl and knowingly taking the risk of the unknown strength of fentanyl for the greater euphoric effects and high tolerance to heroin for chronic users.

Figure 6. Overdose Deaths Involving Synthetic Opioids Other than Methadone, 2005 – 2018



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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While diverted and inadvertent deaths due to prescription fentanyl occurs, the majority of recent cases of fentanyl related deaths involve illegally made fentanyl⁴. Even deaths involving prescription fentanyl often involve organized crime and amateur but skilled chemists extracting fentanyl from transdermal patches¹². According to the DEA, in 2020, the National Drug Threat Assessment showed large scale organized crime is prevalent in the trafficking and production of fentanyl. The majority of the trafficking and production of fentanyl is occurring in Mexico by the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. The fentanyl is pushed into the state and then regional traffickers recruit local dealers to push out the illicit substances. Often times other drugs like heroin and cocaine are cut in the local region with fentanyl or even carfentanyl, which is so powerful that it can tranquilize an elephant with one dart^{15,19}.

These local dealers use fentanyl in heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, counterfeit OxyContin and hydrocodone pills, and benzodiazepines. Fentanyl and its analogues are among the cheapest drugs available to dealers, especially compared to cocaine and heroin, making them attractive alternatives to pure substances. Ironically, the analogues were often developed to be a safer alternatives to fentanyl, but have become a major factor in the overdose crisis²¹. As a prescription, fentanyl was originally used in combination with constant oxygen, mitigating the side effects²¹. Needless to

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say, street users are not using street drugs laced with fentanyl while being supplied oxygen, making respiratory depression a deadly “side effect.”

Illicitly manufactured fentanyl (also known as IMF) is any fentanyl that is created outside of a controlled laboratory, such as a pharmaceutical setting¹⁵. When most experts refer to “fentanyl,” they almost exclusively refer to IMF, not diverted or prescription fentanyl. The vast majority of fentanyl overdoses are due to smuggled fentanyl produced outside of the United States^{16,19}.

The data clearly shows that fentanyl is one of the leading killers when it comes to drug overdoses in Santa Barbara County. The change from 2015-2021 is so large it’s hard to imagine. Even deaths that involve other drugs still have fentanyl listed as a cause of death. The pervasiveness of fentanyl in the drug supply makes people who believe they are consuming other drugs, such as powder cocaine, unsuspecting victims of fentanyl. Sometimes a dealer will add fentanyl to their drugs to have a “unique” product, one that produces a different high than cocaine or methamphetamine alone. When news stories talk about 18–24-year-olds dying from fentanyl, it is very likely that they died from an impure recreational drug. Even in these cases, the users may not know there is fentanyl in their supply, even if not in a lethal amount. Although the number of non-fatal overdoses cannot be accurately measured in their entirety, there are many more non-fatal overdoses than fatal overdoses. When a chart shows fentanyl deaths up the actual number of non-fatal overdoses is likely up more.

Sources of Illicitly Manufactured Fentanyl in Santa Barbara County

About the DEA National Drug Threat Assessment

The March 2021 report is designed to assist law enforcement in the development of drug enforcement strategies. The report covers a variety of topics, including the national extent of drug use and abuse, the organizations conducting drug smuggling into the Country and various States, and trends¹⁹.

High Level Observations from the Assessment

A main point addressed in the report is fentanyl, showing how important fentanyl is to the drug crisis in Santa Barbara County and the nation¹⁹. The executive summary mentions that fentanyl produced in foreign laboratories and trafficked into the U.S. is primarily responsible for fueling the ongoing opioid crisis¹⁷. Due to the accelerating nature of the drug crisis, the DEA has “high confidence” fentanyl will remain the greatest threat moving forward and that its availability and illegal use will remain “very high.”¹⁹

DEA and Opioids

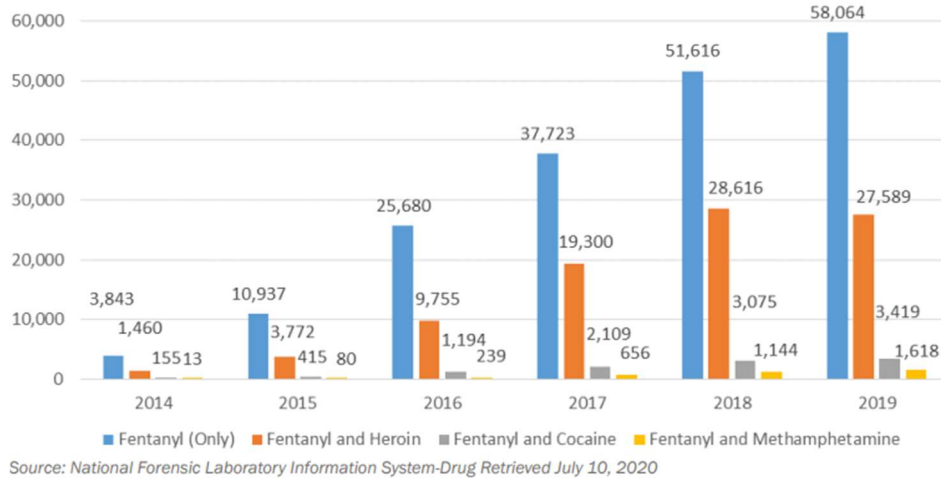
The DEA has determined that the top 2 drug threats are fentanyl followed by heroin¹⁹. This assessment is made in part with CDC data showing extremely high rates of fentanyl overdose deaths, one of the top killers in the state as of the CDPH overdose dashboard reports being fentanyl and synthetic opioids^{9,19}. The DEA believes that fentanyl will remain the top threat and, despite law enforcement efforts, remain “very high” in availability on the street¹⁹. The DEA also believes that fentanyl will be particularly deadly when used in combination with other drugs, specifically mentioning heroin¹⁹.

The small amount of fentanyl needed to supply local suppliers for long periods of time makes it the ideal substance to smuggle¹⁹. Mexican trafficking organizations are combining precursor chemicals from China to manufacture fentanyl. These organizations then smuggle the fentanyl into the US, which is the main source of fentanyl in Santa Barbara County¹⁹. The Mexican border is a known hub of drug smuggling and, subsequently, a substantial amount of fentanyl is brought directly into California¹⁹. Again, the potency and small amount of fentanyl needed to supply a dealer makes a single parcel of fentanyl deadly.

The DEA Assessment concludes that fentanyl is inadvertently consumed in other substances, primarily arriving from Mexico¹⁹. The most prominent cartels in trafficking drugs into Santa Barbara County are the Sinaloa Cartel on the eastern half of the region, and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel dominating the western half^{16,19}. Both are Mexican in origin¹⁹. They employ Mexican Americans to supply to local dealers, including their contaminated and poly-drug supplies¹⁹. In addition, the local dealers can further cut and combine drugs supplied to them by these cartels. These cartels, due to the powerful nature of fentanyl, use many small shipments to reduce the likelihood of a large load being lost to drug enforcement¹⁹.

What are the Combination Trends in Seizures?

Figure 4. Fentanyl Combination Reports to NFLIS-Drug, 2014 – 2019



19

Even though heroin overdoses are down, and fentanyl overdoses are up, less fentanyl is seized compared to heroin because it is more potent per gram and therefore less mass of fentanyl is needed to cause a lethal overdose^{8,9,19}. If the lethality of the amount seized were equivalent, 50x as much heroin would be seized as fentanyl.

In conclusion, the DEA believes that fentanyl will remain the most significant threat in nation in the upcoming years¹⁹. In 2021, the DEA offices in the greater Los Angeles area seized over 3 million counterfeit pills suspected to be fentanyl, which was nearly a three-fold increase from the previous year in 2020.

With the lifting of pandemic restrictions, the growth of other drugs back into the supply chain increases the risk of all drugs, fentanyl and stimulants, and counterfeit pills included.

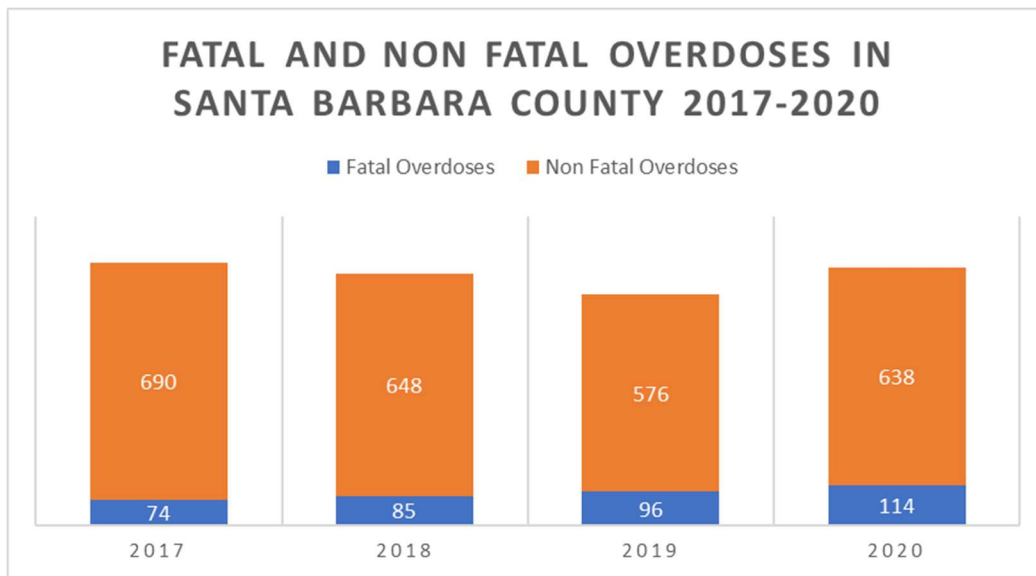
Spotlight on Santa Barbara County

Recognizing the impact of the opioid crisis and the importance of timely, actionable data, Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown partnered with Project Opioid to develop a best practice response to the overall overdose incidents in his jurisdiction. Because of these efforts, Santa Barbara County is developing a plan to respond in a timely manner to tackle the emergence of illicit fentanyl threatening its citizens. Below is an analysis of the history of the opioid crisis in Santa Barbara County since 2017.

Overdoses in Santa Barbara County

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office uses Coroner’s Office data to track their overdoses. As of the latest report from the Coroner’s Office team (December 31, 2021), there were 133 fatal overdose incidents in Santa Barbara County in 2021, compared to 114 at the end of December 2020, indicating a 16% increase in overdoses. By comparison,

in 2017 there were 74 fatal overdose incidents in Santa Barbara County during the same time period, resulting in a 79.7% increase from 2017 to 2021⁸.



8,9

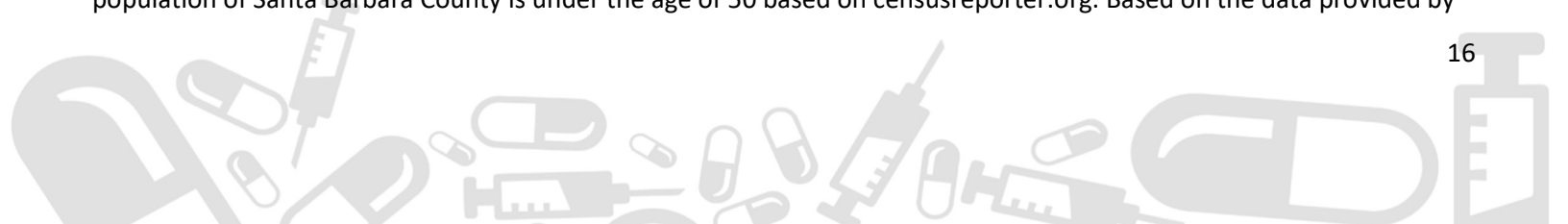
Demographics of Overdose Victims

	2021 Fatal Overdose Victims	Santa Barbara County Demographics
Total	133	448,229
Percentage White	57%	43.8%
Percentage Black	2%	2.4%
Percentage Hispanic	36%	46%
Percentage Asian	3%	3.9%
Percentage Male	73%	50%
Poverty Rate		10.5%

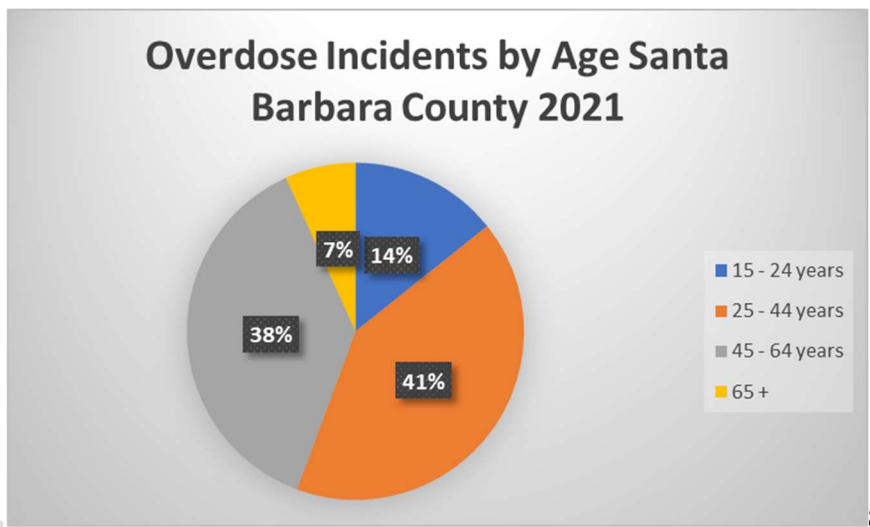
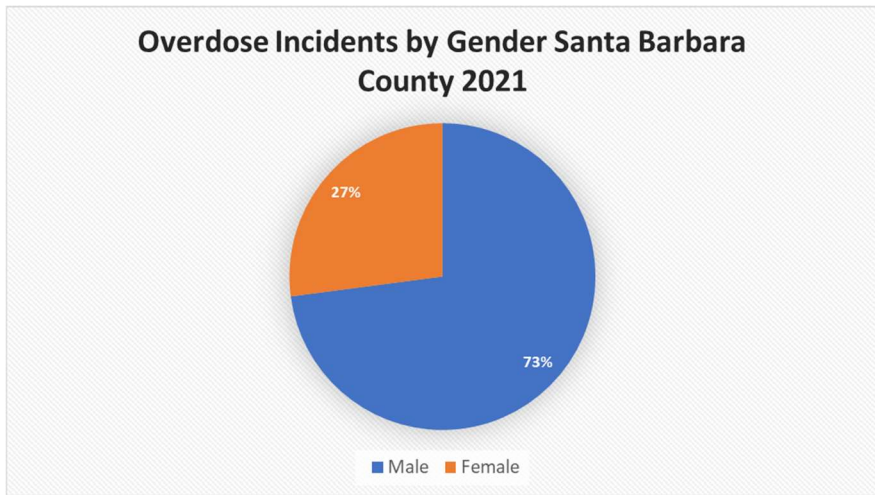
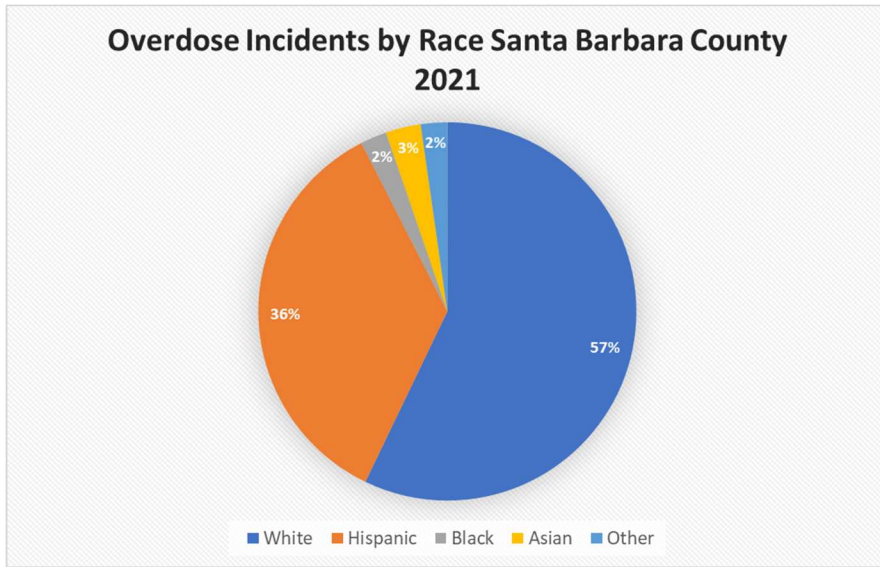
3,8

The demographic characteristics of overdose victims in Santa Barbara County have remained consistent throughout 2020 and 2021, the data available for this report. Of the overdose victims, in January 2020-December 2020 and January 2021-December 2021, 57% are White, and 36% are Hispanic. Given the population of Santa Barbara County, this shows that there is an overrepresentation of White victims, which is consistent with data from around the United States. The overdose victims are also overrepresented by males at 73% of the overdose victims, but only 50% of the population of Santa Barbara County^{3,8}.

It is slightly more difficult to draw comparisons for the age of overdose victims in Santa Barbara County versus its population because the age ranges used are not the same. However, we do know that approximately half of the population of Santa Barbara County is under the age of 50 based on censusreporter.org. Based on the data provided by

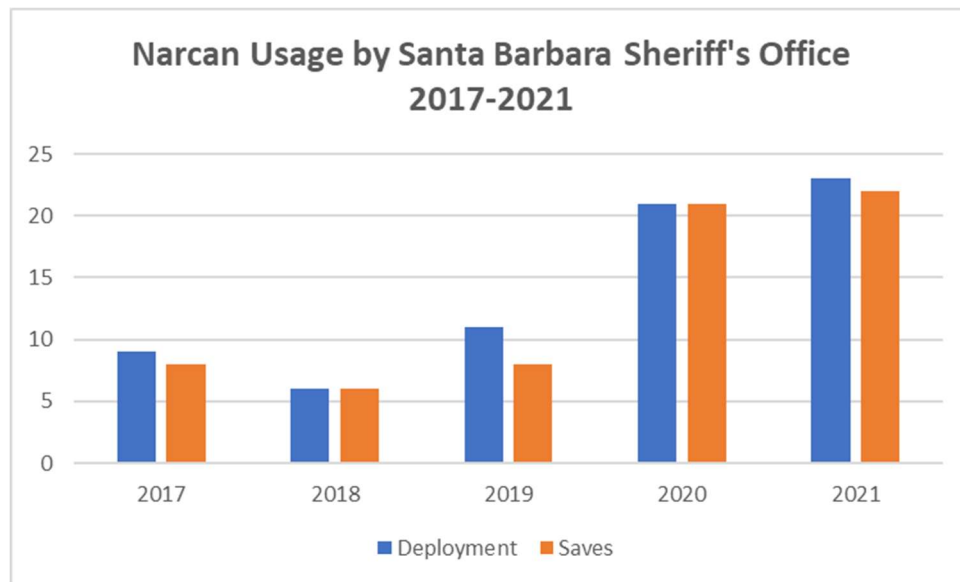


the Coroner's Office, we know that over 60% of overdose victims are under the age of 50, once again indicating that this age group is overrepresented in overdose incidents.



Narcan Deployments in Santa Barbara County

One of the greatest successes in combatting the opioid epidemic in the County is the widespread usage and availability of Narcan by law enforcement and the reporting of Narcan incidents by Emergency Medical Services (EMS). From 2020 to 2021, there has been an approximate 50% increase in Narcan deployments by emergency personnel in Santa Barbara County. In 2021 there were 727 overdose related calls to 911 that resulted in Narcan use. In 20% of these cases Narcan was administered by first responders²². The Sheriff's Office alone has seen a 155% increase in Narcan deployments since 2017. The bottom line is that by equipping non-medical first responders with Narcan, Santa Barbara County is saving lives.



Conclusion

Santa Barbara County has seen an increase in overdose incidents much like the rest of the state of California. However, by implementing and enacting a real-time, actionable data strategy, they are able to respond to the geographic and demographic changes in the overdose crisis. By empowering their law enforcement officers and EMS personnel with Narcan, they were able to save lives.

Conclusions

In Santa Barbara County, the overdose crisis has changed over the last six years. The profile of an overdose victim has changed since 2015, along with the nature of the crisis. Prescription opioids are down almost 70% and heroin overdoses are on the decline yet overdose deaths are up. The culprit is illicit fentanyl made internationally and brought to the United States. Fentanyl has made its way into every drug in Santa Barbara County, including counterfeit pills, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. Polysubstance deaths are on the rise: victims of overdoses are slightly younger, more likely to be White, more likely to be male, and much more likely to have died of fentanyl than in 2015.

Law enforcement and media have tracked fentanyl ingredients from China being brought to Mexico, with fentanyl being made in Mexico, smuggled across the border into California, and brought to Santa Barbara County, where it has been causing this crisis to accelerate. Fentanyl is intelligently smuggled into the region to the point where law enforcement believes it will remain the top threat in Santa Barbara County, and that supply chains will recover following the continued relaxation of COVID-19 related restrictions.

Santa Barbara County has paved the way for illustrating that community interventions, such as Narcan deployment by EMS and Law Enforcement officials, leads to more lives saved. Project Opioid Santa Barbara will continue to develop and implement a collaborative plan to address both the supply and demand for fentanyl in Santa Barbara County.



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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES VISIT

The Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office - <https://www.sbsheriff.org/>

Santa Barbara Opioid Safety Coalition - <https://opioidsafetysb.org/>

