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Annual Drug Overdose Report Shows Eight-Year Low in Prescription Opioid Deaths and Four-Year Low in Heroin Deaths in Ohio

Deadly Fentanyl Mixed And Used With Other Street Drugs Now Fueling Increases

COLUMBUS – Prescription opioid-related overdose deaths have reached an eight-year low and heroin-related overdose deaths are at a four-year low, according to a new report released by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). Illegally produced fentanyl which is being mixed and used with other street drugs such as cocaine, heroin and psychostimulants like methamphetamine is now driving Ohio's unintentional overdose deaths – 4,854 in 2017.

The report also revealed that the number of overdose deaths declined during the second half of 2017 by 23 percent.

“The good news is Ohio is seeing significant progress in reducing the number of prescription opioids available for abuse, and as a result, prescription opioid-related overdose deaths that don't also involve fentanyl are at their lowest level since 2009,” said Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Director Mark Hurst, M.D. “This progress is significant because prescription opioid abuse is frequently a gateway to heroin and fentanyl use.”

“While data shows us that Ohio's efforts to curb prescription opioid abuse are working, the driving force today in Ohio's ever-changing opioid epidemic is deadly fentanyl being used with other street drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine,” said ODH Director Lance Himes.

In 2017, illegally produced fentanyl and related drugs like carfentanil, which are opioids, were involved in 71 percent of all unintentional overdose deaths. By comparison, fentanyl was involved in 58 percent of all overdose deaths in 2016, 38 percent in 2015, and 20 percent in 2014.

Ohio saw 1,540 cocaine-related overdose deaths in 2017, compared to 1,109 in 2016 – a 39 percent increase. Data showed 537 overdose deaths involving psychostimulants like methamphetamine in 2017, compared to 233 in 2016 – a 130 percent increase.

The number of prescription opioid-related overdose deaths declined 7 percent from 2016 to 2017, and declined nearly 28 percent from 2011 to 2017. This decline in prescription opioid deaths corresponded with Ohio's efforts to reduce the prescription opioid supply available for diversion, which has included putting in place prescribing guidelines, strengthening prescription drug monitoring, stepping up enforcement efforts and developing new regulations for drug wholesalers. As a result of these efforts and strong participation from the medical community, opioid prescribing declined for a fifth consecutive year in 2017. Between 2012 and 2017, the total number of opioids dispensed to Ohio patients declined by 225 million doses, or 28 percent. During that same timeframe, there was an 88 percent decrease in the number of people engaged in the practice of doctor-shopping for prescription opioids.

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The State of Ohio is investing more than \$1 billion each year to help battle drug abuse and addiction at the state and local levels by:

- Sponsoring community rapid response teams to follow up with individuals who survive a drug overdose to seek to connect them to treatment
- Increasing the number of medical professionals qualified to prescribe medication-assisted treatment, the gold standard for treating opioid use disorder
- Expanding local prescription drug overdose prevention initiatives
- Pursuing scientific breakthroughs to battle drug abuse and addiction
- Expanding access to the opioid overdose reversal drug naloxone to save lives
- Implementing common sense reforms to prevent pain medication abuse
- Expanding data and tools available in Ohio's prescription drug reporting and monitoring program known as OARRS used by opioid prescribers and pharmacists to enhance patient safety
- Providing funding to support toxicology screenings during Ohio coroner drug overdose investigations
- Educating prescribers and patients on how to safely manage pain and prevent pain medication abuse

The complete ODH report on 2017 drug overdose deaths is available [here](#), along with details about Ohio's comprehensive efforts combating drug abuse and overdose deaths, key initiatives to combat prescription opioid abuse, and a timeline of 2011-2018 key initiatives.

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