

MKE Elevate Issue Brief: SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Substance Misuse includes the following: Drug use (THC, opiates, prescription drugs, cocaine), alcohol use, and tobacco and vaping.



Scope and scale of problem

Substance misuse trends in Milwaukee County have been on the rise for decades. The Milwaukee Health Department continues to tackle substance misuse including overdose prevention, illegal drug use and harm reduction, and prescription opioid misuse. Data is used to analyze substance misuse trends including fatal overdose data from Milwaukee County Medical Examiner’s Office (MCMEO) and nonfatal overdose data from the Milwaukee Fire Department Emergency Medical Services (MFD EMS).

Drug – related overdose deaths have been **on the rise** in the United States since the 1990s. More specifically, in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, between 2015 and 2022*, **3,519 lives were lost** from a drug related overdose. In **2019**, there were **419 overdose-related deaths**, in **2020** there were **544**, in **2021** there were **644** and so far in **2022** there have been **518 confirmed** with an estimation from the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner’s Office that there will be **close to 700 total** drug related overdose deaths in 2022. The outcomes in Milwaukee have gotten worse and the numbers continue to rise; from 2019 – 2022 there has been a 67% increase in drug related deaths.

* There are about 162 probable drug death cases pending from MCMEO for 2022 (likely 7% increase from 2021).

Key data

The data below was analyzed by MHD based on data from **Milwaukee County Medical Examiner’s Office**.

Year	Total Deaths	Fentanyl Deaths	Communities of Color
2019	419	58%	39%
2020	544	75%	41%
2021	644	79%	48%
2022*	518 (as of Dec, with 162 cases still pending)	80%	53%

According to data collected by **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)**:

- **29.8%** of WI High School Youth consumed at least one alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days.
- **30.6%** of WI High School Youth have used marijuana at some point in their life.
- **11.4%** of WI High School Youth have taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor prescription or differently than how the doctor told them to use it at some time during their life.
- **1.4%** of WI High School Youth have used heroin at some point in their life.
- **1.9%** of WI High School Youth have used methamphetamine at some point in their life.
- **13.7%** of WI High School Youth were offered, sold or given an illegal drug on school property within 12 months of taking the survey.

Equity impact

Historically, opiate use has predominately impacted **white, non-Hispanic males between 30-65 years of age**. However, there is no demographic that is not impacted by substance use.

Interestingly, in Milwaukee County, **overdose deaths have continued to rise in communities of color** throughout recent years (seen in table above).

Community buy in

In the **Priority Issue Survey**, substance use was selected as the **5th most common category**.

In the **\$100 mock activity**, substance use was ranked **8th out of 10**, with **5%** of the mock budget allocated for it.

There are many community groups, key stakeholders, and various implementation partners that meet regarding substance misuse and overdose prevention in Milwaukee County. Some examples include: MORI, Northside Collective, OFR, ODPHAST, MAT Behind the Walls, CCHOCTF and many more (see below).

Initiatives	Partners	Purpose
Milwaukee Overdose Response Initiative (MORI)	MFD, MHD, CMS, Clean Slate, WisHope	Quick overdose response team that includes MFD community paramedic and peer support specialist.
Milwaukee Community Collective	WCS, CMS, Samad's House, Street Angels, Hunger Task Force	Weekly harm reduction resource distribution initiative concentrating on the North and South sides of Milwaukee.
Overdose Fatality Review Board (OFR)	DOJ, EMS, Medical Examiner, MCW, treatment providers, mental health providers, healthcare providers, LHDs in MKE Co	Monthly meetings to review life of at least 2 decedents from past year and discuss what impacted their substance use and how key stakeholders can prevent future overdoses.
Overdose Public Health and Safety (OD PHAST)	MCW, ME, treatment providers, DOJ, MAT, MPD, MFD	Discuss data trends and meet with work groups regarding education, prevention and fentanyl.
MAT Behind the Walls	BHS, CMS, Wellpath, HOC, jail	Program that offers 3 FDA approved medications to assist in behavior therapy - methadone, buprenorphine (e.g. suboxone), naltrexone (e.g. vivitrol) for incarcerated folks suffering from SUD and weekly counseling to prepare for reentry in society.
City County Heroin Cocaine Opioid Task Force (CCHOCTF)	City, County, Lived experience, ME, Community agencies	To combat substance use - presentations on various projects, what data shows (trends), legislator interests, medication overview.

Ability to make change in next 5 years

Could more be done if MKE Elevate takes on issue?

Unclear - As substance misuse is a complex issue, there are many evidence-based projects, programs and initiatives underway in the city and county of Milwaukee. These include a variety of stakeholders and diverse groups working on substance misuse.

Is there political will to address issue?

Yes - In the City of Milwaukee, Alderman Michael Murphy has been the lead advocate for substance misuse and overdose prevention. There continues to be acknowledgment and support of imperative programs and initiatives around substance misuse and overdose prevention from leaders in Milwaukee and Wisconsin.

Resources

Is there staffing to support an action team?

Yes - there is a Public Health Strategist focused on substance misuse.

Is there funding available?

Yes - In February of 2022, major drug distributors Cardinal Health, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen, and drugmaker Johnson & Johnson, reached a settlement to provide about \$26 billion for remediation of the opioid epidemic in exchange for states, U.S. territories, and Puerto Rico agreeing to drop future legal claims against the companies. The State of Wisconsin is expecting \$400 million over 18 years, where WI will keep 30%, and 70% will be distributed to cities and counties that signed on to lawsuit.

Milwaukee County is expecting about \$58 million and the City of Milwaukee is expecting about \$18 million over 18 years. This is a unique funding mechanism that will provide immense opportunity for the entire nation to work on the opioid epidemic and save lives.



Our Health. Our Community. Our Future.

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