

MAINE MONTHLY OVERDOSE REPORT

For December 2024

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Overview

This report documents suspected and confirmed fatal and nonfatal drug overdoses in Maine during December 2024 as well as for the period January 2023–December 2024 (Table 1). The total number of confirmed and suspected fatal overdoses during 2024 is 490, 19.1% lower than the total confirmed fatal overdoses for 2023, 606. The total number of nonfatal overdoses during 2024 is 8,045, 13.3% lower than the total reported nonfatal overdoses for 2023, 9,275. During December 2024, the proportion of fatal overdoses averaged 6.8% of total overdoses. Monthly proportions of 2024 fatalities fluctuated from a low of 4.8% in August to a high of 7.2% in March. During 2024, fatal overdoses constituted 5.7% of all overdoses, lower than 2023 (6.1%).

Data derived from multiple statewide sources were compiled and deduplicated to calculate fatal and nonfatal overdose totals (Table 1). These include nonfatal overdose incidents reported by hospital emergency departments (ED), nonfatal emergency medical service (EMS) responses without transport to the ED, overdose reversals reported by law enforcement in the absence of EMS, and overdose reversals reported by community members or agencies receiving state-supplied naloxone through the Maine Naloxone Distribution Initiative. There are also an unknown number of private overdose reversals that were not reported and an unknown number of community-reported reversals that may have overlapped with emergency response by EMS or law enforcement. The total number of fatal overdoses in this report includes those that have been confirmed, as well as those that are suspected but not yet confirmed for June, August, October, November, and December 2024 (see Figure 1).

The total number of suspected and confirmed fatal overdoses and reported nonfatal overdoses for December 2024, 649, is displayed in Table 1 near the bottom row. Of those 649, there were 44 (6.8%) confirmed and suspected fatal overdoses, 354 (54.5%) nonfatal emergency department visits, 190 (29.3%) nonfatal EMS responses not transported to the emergency department, 49 (7.6%) reported community overdose reversals, and 12 (1.8%) law enforcement reversals in incidents that did not include EMS.

Figure 1. Suspected and confirmed fatal overdoses, all drugs, January 2023 through December 2024

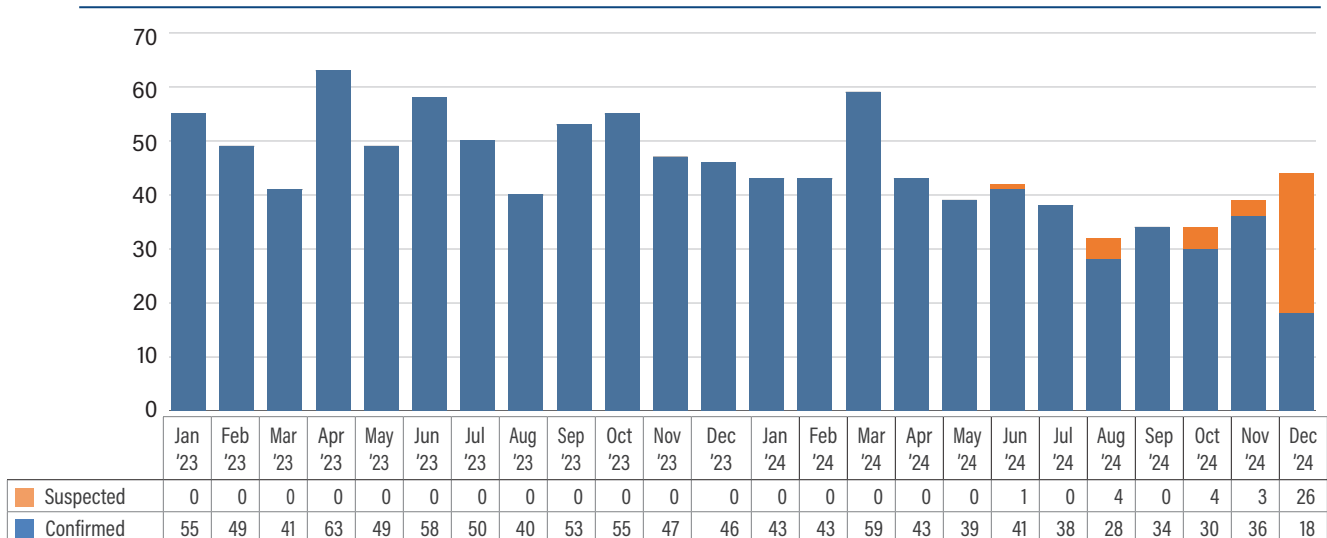


Table 1: Composite reported overdose totals, all drugs, January 2023–December 2024

	Nonfatal					Total confirmed and suspected fatal overdoses	Total overdoses
	Emergency Dept.	EMS not transported to emergency	Community reversals with naloxone	Law enforcement nonfatal overdose response without EMS	Total nonfatal overdoses		
January 2023	296	238	184	48	766	55	821
February 2023	348	204	192	30	774	49	823
March 2023	382	260	237	54	933	41	974
April 2023	270	232	202	29	733	63	796
May 2023	295	238	165	47	745	49	794
June 2023	378	232	219	35	864	58	922
July 2023	340	307	173	34	854	50	904
August 2023	330	266	152	22	770	40	810
September 2023	390	256	141	26	813	53	866
October 2023	317	274	147	17	754	55	809
November 2023	255	214	101	20	590	47	637
December 2023	325	202	129	23	678	46	724
2023 YTD total	3926	2921	2042	385	9274	606	9880
% of 2023 YTD total	40.6%	28.0%	21.1%	4.0%	93.9%	6.1%	100%
January 2024	269	226	139	26	660	43	703
February 2024	305	242	136	28	711	43	754
March 2024	379	233	119	27	758	59	817
April 2024	253	205	190	14	662	43	705
May 2024	311	257	165	24	757	39	796
June 2024	344	232	202	12	790	42	832
July 2024	293	235	166	23	717	38	755
August 2024	289	215	119	10	633	32	665
September 2024	318	199	114	6	637	34	671
October 2024	301	198	86	17	602	34	636
November 2024	260	177	58	18	513	39	552
December 2024	354	190	49	12	605	44	649
2024 YTD total	3676	2609	1543	217	8045	490	8535
% of 2024 YTD total	43.1%	30.6%	18.1%	2.5%	94.3%	5.7%	100%

Law Enforcement Response to Fatal and Nonfatal Overdose Incidents

Due to the method used to deduplicate nonfatal overdose incidents to derive a composite number of overdoses for the month, the total activity of both law enforcement officials and EMS agencies is underrepresented in Table 1 because of the overlap between them. The process used to deduplicate overdoses begins by removing fatal overdoses from the emergency department and EMS overdose incidents. Then the number of patients transported to emergency departments by Maine EMS are removed from the EMS overdose incidents. Finally, EMS involvement and fatal overdose incidents are removed from law enforcement responses.

Table 2 shows the public safety response to fatal and nonfatal overdose events in January–December 2024 as well as January–December 2023. During 2023, law enforcement officers responded to a reported 1,617 incidents (564 fatal; 1,053 nonfatal), and Maine EMS responded to a reported 10,318 incidents (480 fatal; 9,838 nonfatal). During 2024, law enforcement officers responded to a reported 1,151 overdose incidents (446 fatal; 705 nonfatal), and Maine EMS responded to a reported 9,509 incidents (391 fatal; 9,118 nonfatal). The total number of overdoses responded to by Maine EMS in 2024 decreased 7.8% compared to 2023 while the total number of overdoses responded to by law enforcement decreased 28.8%.

Table 2: Fatal and nonfatal overdose emergency response counts from law enforcement and EMS, including overlapping cases

	Fatal overdose response Jan-Dec 2023	Nonfatal overdose response Jan-Dec 2023	Total overdose response Jan-Dec 2023	Fatal overdose response Jan-Dec 2024	Nonfatal overdose response Jan-Dec 2024	Total Overdose Response Jan-Dec 2024
Maine EMS	480	9838	10318	391	9118	9509
Law Enforcement	564	1053	1617	446	705	1151

*Please note numbers will fluctuate from month to month as public safety agencies catch up their reporting. Due to methodological convention, alcohol-only cases are excluded from this table. However, we recognize that alcohol is a large part of substance misuse epidemic. Cases with both drugs and alcohol are included. Please note these numbers may fluctuate higher than the data in Table 1. This is due to the fact that some EMS overdoses responses, once the patient is transported to the hospital, are deemed to be non-overdose emergencies such as cardiac arrest or diabetic coma.

County Distribution of Suspected Nonfatal Overdoses with EMS Response

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of nonfatal overdoses to which EMS responded at the county level. Overdose reversal totals reported by community partners and emergency departments are not reported by county; only EMS case data include county frequencies. The December 2024 monthly totals in the far right column can be compared to the percentage of the census population on the far left, the percentage of nonfatal overdoses for the year in 2023, or in 2024. Caution must be exercised viewing single counties, especially for a single month, due to small numbers. These may fluctuate randomly, without reflecting any statistically significant trend.

Percentage totals for the year 2024 for most counties fall within 0 to 1 percentage points of the 2020 census distribution. Compared to the 2020 census proportion, Androscoggin County is 2 percentage points higher and Cumberland County is 3 percentage points higher and York County is 4 percentage points lower.

Table 3: County of EMS incident among suspected and confirmed nonfatal overdoses

	% 2020 estimated Census population	Jan-Dec 2023 Est. N = 9838		Jan-Dec 2024 Est. N = 9118		Dec 2024 Est. N = 691	
Androscoggin	8%	1009	10%	913	10%	64	9%
Aroostook	5%	485	5%	488	5%	28	4%
Cumberland	22%	2309	23%	2309	25%	201	29%
Franklin	2%	160	2%	165	2%	18	3%
Hancock	4%	276	3%	241	3%	14	2%
Kennebec	9%	963	10%	907	10%	54	8%
Knox	3%	327	3%	262	3%	24	3%
Lincoln	3%	227	2%	171	2%	19	3%
Oxford	4%	397	4%	334	4%	30	4%
Penobscot	11%	1351	14%	1136	12%	89	13%
Piscataquis	1%	114	1%	101	1%	7	1%
Sagadahoc	3%	151	2%	152	2%	8	1%
Somerset	4%	471	5%	399	4%	25	4%
Waldo	3%	220	2%	197	2%	12	2%
Washington	2%	215	2%	225	2%	15	2%
York	16%	1163	12%	1118	12%	83	12%

*EMS nonfatal overdose counts include incidents where a patient may have died after admission to the ED. Please note numbers will fluctuate from month-to-month as public safety agencies catch up their reporting. Due to methodological convention, alcohol-only cases are excluded from this table. However, we recognize that alcohol is a large part of substance misuse epidemic. Cases with both drugs and alcohol are included.

Age and Gender Distribution of Suspected Nonfatal Overdoses with EMS Response

Table 4 displays the age composition of individuals suspected of experiencing nonfatal overdoses involving EMS response in December 2024 and for the years 2024 and 2023. Overdose reversal totals reported by community partners and emergency departments are not categorized and reported by age; only EMS case data include monthly age frequencies. Age group totals can be compared to the 2020 census proportion in the far left column. Caution must be exercised as the small number of cases in each month is vulnerable to random fluctuation that may not reflect a significant statistical trend. The age distribution for both 2023 and 2024 year to date compared to the 2020 census proportion shows a disproportionately large impact of suspected nonfatal overdose victims with EMS involvement for those aged 25–54. This impact is illustrated by looking at the 25–54 year age groups, which constitutes 36% of the population in the 2020 census compared to 64% in the overdose population during 2023 and 61% in 2024. In 2024 there are 14 percentage points fewer overdose victims among those under the age of 18 compared to the percentage of the census population in that age group. Similarly, there were 3 percentage points fewer overdose victims among those aged 55–64, and 11 percentage points fewer overdose victims among those 65 and older compared to the percentages of the census population for those age groups.

Table 4: Reported age group among suspected nonfatal overdose victims involving EMS response

	% 2020 estimated Census population	Jan-Dec 2023 Est. N = 9775		Jan-Dec 2024 Est. N = 9161		Dec 2024 Est. N = 689	
< 18	18%	402	4%	384	4%	23	3%
18-24	7%	903	9%	829	9%	59	9%
25-34	12%	2085	21%	1781	19%	136	20%
35-44	12%	2603	27%	2343	26%	183	27%
45-54	12%	1522	16%	1484	16%	109	16%
55-64	16%	1317	13%	1230	13%	96	14%
> 64	23%	944	10%	1110	12%	83	12%

Table 5 displays the reported gender of individuals experiencing nonfatal overdoses involving EMS response in December 2024 and for the years 2024 and 2023. Overdose reversal totals reported by community partners and emergency departments are not categorized by gender; only EMS case data include monthly gender categories. Gender group totals can be compared to the 2020 census proportion by age group in the far left column or the January–December 2023 totals in the center column. When comparing the January–December 2024 with 2023, as well as the census population proportion, caution must be exercised as the small number of cases in each month is vulnerable to random fluctuation that may not reflect a significant statistical trend. Males represent 49% of the 2020 estimated census population, 61% of the nonfatal overdose victims with EMS involvement in 2023, and 58% during 2024.

Table 5: Reported gender among suspected nonfatal overdose victims involving EMS response

	% 2020 estimated Census population	Jan-Dec 2023 Est. N = 9794		Jan-Dec 2024 Est. N = 8809		Dec 2024 Est. N = 665	
Male	49%	5970	61%	5122	58%	387	58%
Female	51%	3798	39%	3686	42%	278	42%
Transgender	Not collected	26	0.3%	1	0%	0	0%

County Distribution of Suspected and Confirmed Fatal Overdoses

Table 6 shows the frequency distribution of fatal overdoses at the county level.¹ The December 2024 monthly totals in the far right column can be compared either to the percentage of the census population in the far left column, the percentage of county fatal overdoses for 2023, or the 2024 percentages. Caution must be exercised when viewing single counties with small numbers for a single month. These may fluctuate randomly, without reflecting any significant statistical trend. The 2024 percentages for most counties fall within 0 to 1 percentage points of the 2020 census distribution. Compared to the 2020 census proportion, Aroostook County is 3 percentage points higher, Penobscot County is 2 percentage points higher, York County is 5 percentage points lower and Cumberland County is 3 percentage points lower.

¹ This table reports the county of death rather than the county of residence.

Table 6: County of death among suspected and confirmed fatal overdoses

	% 2020 estimated Census population	Jan–Dec 2023 Est. N = 606		Jan–Dec 2024 Est. N = 490		Dec 2024 Est. N = 44	
Androscoggin	8%	69	11%	46	9%	1	2%
Aroostook	5%	40	7%	39	8%	5	11%
Cumberland	22%	118	19%	91	19%	12	27%
Franklin	2%	6	1%	6	1%	1	2%
Hancock	4%	22	4%	13	3%	1	2%
Kennebec	9%	60	10%	47	10%	2	5%
Knox	3%	16	3%	22	4%	2	5%
Lincoln	3%	7	1%	17	3%	3	7%
Oxford	4%	25	4%	20	4%	1	2%
Penobscot	11%	91	15%	65	13%	9	20%
Piscataquis	1%	17	3%	5	1%	0	0%
Sagadahoc	3%	7	1%	7	1%	0	0%
Somerset	4%	29	5%	22	4%	2	5%
Waldo	3%	10	2%	18	4%	1	2%
Washington	2%	25	4%	16	3%	0	0%
York	16%	64	11%	56	11%	4	9%

Age and Sex Distribution of Fatal Overdose Victims

Table 7 displays the age and sex composition¹ of the fatal overdose population for December 2024 and the years 2024 and 2023, compared to the 2020 estimated census population. When comparing the December 2024 data with 2023 as well as the census population proportion, caution must be exercised as the small number of cases in each month is vulnerable to random fluctuation that may not reflect a significant statistical trend.

The cumulative proportion of males is lower in 2024 (66%) compared to 2023 (73%). The age distribution for 2024 compared to the 2020 census proportion shows a disproportionately large impact of fatal overdoses in those aged 35–64, as was true in 2023. That group includes 40% of the 2020 estimated census population, compared to 75% in the fatal overdose population in 2023 and 74% during 2024. Compared to the census population, in 2024, there were 4 percentage points fewer fatal overdoses among those aged 18–24 and 14 percentage points fewer among those 65 and older compared to the census estimated population for those age groups.

There were, however, differences between the age structures of the nonfatal overdoses (Table 4) and the fatal overdoses. In 2024, the highest proportion of both fatal and nonfatal overdoses was among those aged 35–44 (26% among nonfatal and 29% among fatal). The second highest age group for nonfatal overdoses was 25–34 (19%), but 45–54 (25%) among fatal overdoses.

¹ Note that death certificate reports sex as male or female without other gender categories.

Table 7: Decedent reported age group and sex among suspected and confirmed fatal overdoses*

	% 2020 estimated Census population	Jan-Dec 2023 Est. N = 606	Jan-Dec 2024 Est. N = 490	Dec 2024 Est. N = 44
Male	49%	440 73%	321 66%	29 66%
< 18	18%	3 0%	4 1%	1 2%
18-24	7%	28 5%	13 3%	0 0%
25-34	12%	85 14%	64 13%	6 14%
35-44	12%	199 33%	144 29%	14 32%
45-54	12%	135 22%	123 25%	10 23%
55-64	16%	118 19%	98 20%	5 11%
> 64	23%	38 6%	44 9%	8 18%

*Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Table 8 displays the reported race and ethnicity of confirmed and suspected fatal overdoses in December 2024, 2024, and 2023 compared to the 2020 estimated census population. Note that race and ethnicity are not finalized until the full death certificate is entered into Vital Records, and a small number of decedents’ records currently lack information about these variables. Out of 488 decedents for whom race was reported in 2024, 93% of the victims were identified as White, 4% as Black/African American, and 2% as American Indian/Alaska Native. These are the nearly identical to the percentages in 2023. The non-White population is 2% higher among fatal overdoses than it is in the census population. Out of 481 decedents for whom Hispanic ethnicity status was reported, 2% were identified as Hispanic, slightly more (1%) than for 2023.

Table 8: Decedent race and ethnicity among suspected and confirmed fatal overdoses*

A: Race	% 2020 Estimated Census Population	Jan-Dec 2023 Race N = 605	Jan-Dec 2024 Race N = 488	Dec 2024 Race Est. N = 44
White alone	94%	554 92%	452 93%	43 98%
Black/African American alone	2%	25 4%	18 4%	1 2%
American Indian/Alaska Native alone	1%	12 2%	9 2%	0 0%
Other race and 2+ races combined	3%	14 2%	9 2%	0 0%
B: Ethnicity	% 2020 estimated Census population	Jan-Dec 2023 Ethnicity N = 589	Jan-Dec 2024 Ethnicity N = 481	Dec 2024 Ethnicity Est. N = 44
Hispanic/Latinx	2%	7 1%	10 2%	0 0%

*Race and ethnicity data for some cases are unavailable until drug deaths are confirmed.

†Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Military Status and Housing Stability of Fatal Overdose Victims

Out of the 490 cases for which military background was reported in 2024, 27 (6%) were identified as having a military background. Out of the 44 cases in December 2024 where military background was reported, 3 (7%) were identified as having a military background.

Of the 490 total suspected and confirmed fatal overdose cases year to date in 2024, undomiciled or transient housing status was reported for 67 (14%) victims. Among those 67, the largest proportions of undomiciled persons were found in Androscoggin County (16, 24%), Cumberland County (16, 24%) and Penobscot County (11, 16%). In December 2024, 5 fatal overdose victims (11%) were identified as undomiciled.

Basic Incident Patterns of Fatal Overdoses

Table 9 reports basic incident patterns for fatal overdoses. December 2024 can be compared to 2023 or 2024 as a whole. Caution must be exercised interpreting a single month of data as numbers may fluctuate randomly and not reflect a statistically significant trend. In addition, data totals may change slightly as suspected cases are confirmed or eliminated.

Both EMS and police responded together to most fatal overdoses (71%) in 2024. Law enforcement was more likely to respond to a scene alone (19%) than EMS (8%). The overwhelming majority (92%) of confirmed fatal drug overdoses were ruled as, or suspected of being, accidental manner of death.

Of the 490 confirmed or suspected fatal overdoses in 2024, 148 (30%) had a reported history of prior overdose.

Although most cases had bystanders or witnesses present at the scene by the time first responders arrived, the details about who was present at the time of the overdose were frequently unclear. However, responding family and friends or other bystanders administered naloxone for 65 (13%) of the 2024 fatal overdoses, the same as the proportion in 2023 (13%). Often, EMS and/or law enforcement administered naloxone in addition to bystanders or witnesses. During 2024, 26% of suspected and confirmed fatal overdose cases had naloxone administered at the scene by EMS, bystanders, and/or law enforcement. This rate is the same as 2023 (26%).

Of the 391 suspected or confirmed drug death cases with EMS involvement during 2024, 197 (50%) victims were already deceased when EMS arrived. In the remaining 194 (50%) cases, resuscitation was attempted either at the scene or presumably in the ambulance during transport to the emergency room. One case had an unreported response once EMS arrived. Of those 194 who were still alive when EMS arrived, 68 (35%) were transported, and 126 (65%) did not survive to be transported. Thus, out of 391 ultimately fatal cases with EMS response, only 68 (17%) remained alive long enough to be transported but died during transport or at the emergency room. This outcome is likely due to a combination of the high number of cases with fentanyl as a cause of death and individuals using alone. Fentanyl acts more quickly than other opioids, and there is less time for bystanders to find an overdose victim alive, administer naloxone, and call 911.

Table 9: Incident characteristics among suspected and confirmed fatal overdoses

	Jan-Dec 2023 Est. N = 606		2024 Jan-Dec Est. N = 490		Dec 2024 Est. N = 44	
EMS response alone	36	6%	41	8%	6	14%
Law enforcement alone	120	20%	91	19%	9	20%
EMS and law enforcement	443	73%	350	71%	28	64%
Private transport to Emergency Dept.	5	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Naloxone administration reported at the scene	155	26%	127	26%	10	23%
Bystander only administered	39	6%	48	10%	2	5%
Law enforcement only administered	15	2%	9	2%	1	2%
EMS only administered	43	7%	42	9%	4	9%
EMS and law enforcement administered	10	2%	2	0%	0	0%
EMS and bystander administered	30	5%	12	2%	3	7%
Law enforcement and bystander administered	8	1%	4	1%	0	0%
EMS, bystander, and law enforcement administered	4	1%	1	0%	0	0%
Naloxone administered by unspecified person	3	0%	2	0%	0	0%
History of prior overdose	205	34%	148	30%	12	27%

Table 10 displays the frequencies of the most prominent drug categories causing death among confirmed drug deaths. As expected, within the confirmed drug death cases so far in 2024, nonpharmaceutical fentanyl was the most frequent cause of death, mentioned on the death certificate of 324 (72%) victims.

Fentanyl is nearly always found in combination with multiple other drugs. Heroin involvement, declining rapidly in recent years, was reported as a cause of death in 11 (2%) of 2024 deaths and 12 (2%) of 2023 deaths. Xylazine and nonpharmaceutical tramadol were identified as co-intoxicants with fentanyl for the first time in 2021. Among 452 confirmed deaths in 2024, there were 65 cases (14%) with xylazine listed in addition to fentanyl as a cause of death, and 1 case (<1%) with tramadol listed along with fentanyl.

Stimulants continue to increase as a cause of death, usually in combination with other drugs, particularly fentanyl. Cocaine-involved fatalities constituted 199 (44%) of confirmed cases so far in 2024, higher than 2023 (37%) and an increase from 29% in 2022. Fentanyl is mentioned as a cause in combination with cocaine in 155 cases, 78% of 2024 year-to-date cocaine cases. Methamphetamine was cited as a cause of death in 168 (37%) of the confirmed fatal overdoses so far in 2024, higher than in 2023 (33%); 127 (76%) of the methamphetamine deaths also involved fentanyl as a co-intoxicant cause of death. Cocaine and methamphetamine are named together on 48 (10%) death certificates in 2024, in most of those cases (37, 77%) as co-intoxicants of fentanyl.

Table 10: Key drug categories and combinations causing death among confirmed overdoses

Cause of death (alone or in combination with other drugs) Sample size for confirmed cases only	Jan–Dec 2023 Est. N = 606	Jan–Dec 2024 Est. N = 452	Dec 2024 Est. N = 18
Fentanyl or fentanyl analogs	472 78%	324 72%	9 50%
Heroin	12 2%	11 2%	0 0%
Cocaine	226 37%	199 44%	7 39%
Methamphetamine	199 33%	168 37%	11 61%
Pharmaceutical opioids**	108 18%	80 18%	6 33%
Fentanyl and heroin	12 2%	11 2%	0 0%
Fentanyl and cocaine	192 32%	155 34%	5 28%
Fentanyl and methamphetamine	163 27%	127 28%	5 28%
Fentanyl and xylazine	60 10%	65 14%	4 22%
Fentanyl and tramadol	3 0%	1 0%	0 0%

**Nonpharmaceutical tramadol is now being combined with fentanyl in pills and powders for illicit drug use. When found in combination with fentanyl, and in the absence of a known prescription, tramadol is categorized as a nonpharmaceutical opioid.

Highlight of the Month

By Gordon Smith, Director of Opioid Response, State of Maine

The completion and publication of the December 2024 Overdose Report brings to the end the 12 monthly reports for the year and allows us to look back on the entire year and to look ahead, as well. While these numbers are still preliminary until all the toxicology tests are completed, at this point it appears that there were 490 fatal overdoses in the state in 2024. While that is a tragically high number, it is 19% lower than fatal overdoses in 2023 which was also 16% lower than the deaths in 2022. The combined decline over the two years is 33%. The difference between 2023 and 2024 is 116 lives (606 v. 490). While fatal overdoses have declined nationally, the decline in Maine continues to be among the most significant reductions when compared to other states.

So, what accounts for the decline, both in Maine and nationally. Data analysts and researchers are quick to point out that we don't really know and it will take time and research to reach any conclusions regarding cause and effect. But we can speculate on what impact each of our interventions has had. These activities, along with changes in the drug supply, I believe are most likely the most significant contributors to the decline in mortality.

1. Naloxone. Our naloxone saturation strategy (Maine Naloxone Distribution Initiative) has resulted in over 600,000 doses of this life-saving medication being purchased with state and federal funds beginning in 2019. This medication has played a major role in over 10,000 overdose reversals in the past six years.
2. Treatment. There are more opportunities for SUD treatment in the state, including both residential and outpatient treatment. While gaps still remain, there are over 5200 individuals receiving methadone treatment and between 16,000 and 20,000 receiving buprenorphine. It is now possible in most areas of the state to receive a same day appointment for out-patient SUD treatment, with some of these options being delivered via telemedicine. And on the residential side, there are more than 100 beds available each day for medically supervised withdrawal treatment (formerly called detox). And, most importantly, hundreds of residents of our jails and prison facilities are receiving medication and counseling for substance use disorder. There are also over 100 recovery residences in the state offering between 1000 and 2000 beds to individuals who have completed treatment and are in the early stages of recovery.
3. Harm-Reduction. No one deserves to die because they are using drugs. Since adopting sound and evidence-based harm-reduction principles in 2019, syringe service providers have provided services and supplies to thousands of Mainers, meeting them "where they are" and helping them be as healthy as possible.
4. OPTIONS Behavioral Health Liaisons. There are presently 32 behavioral health liaisons across the state, assisted by 9 recovery coaches. These dedicated individuals reach out to individuals who have survived an overdose or who are otherwise found to be struggling and in need of connections to harm reduction or treatment resources.

It is also likely that the drug supply has become less lethal over the past 18 months. Whether this is the result of a weaker form of fentanyl or of individuals using drugs less lethal than fentanyl, we do not know. But we do know that hundreds of people are alive today who likely would not be if the trends leading up to and including 2022 remained unchanged.

So, how do we keep this positive trend going? Certainly, this is no time to be complacent. We believe that continuing to invest in high priority projects across the four pillars of prevention, treatment, harm-reduction and recovery support is the best strategy going forward. While we will also look for innovative solutions, the previous experience demonstrates that if we continue to provide opportunities for treatment, along with sound and evidence-based harm reduction, thousands of Mainers struggling with substance use disorders will benefit. They deserve no less.

This is not the time to take a victory lap. Every week, fatal overdoses are occurring in our communities and families and communities are grieving. We need to continue to improve the social conditions that so frequently lead our adolescents down the wrong path. But, every day in Maine, hundreds of dedicated individuals are working hard to respond to this public health epidemic. A huge shout out to our harm-reduction workers, SUD treatment providers, recovery coaches, public safety officials and first responders. Lives are saved in the community, not in Augusta and Washington, DC. Thank you for being part of this effort.

Background Information about this Report

This report, funded jointly by the Maine Office of Attorney General and the Office of Behavioral Health,¹ provides an overview of statistics regarding suspected and confirmed fatal and nonfatal drug overdoses each month. Data for the fatal overdoses were collected at the Office of Chief Medical Examiner and data regarding nonfatal overdoses were contributed by the Maine CDC, Maine Emergency Medical Services, Maine ODMAP initiative, Maine Naloxone Distribution Initiative, and Office of Attorney General Naloxone Distribution. Year-to-date numbers are updated as medical examiner cases are finalized, and their overdose status is confirmed or ruled out, and as occasional lagged EMS, ED, and ODMAP data totals are finalized. The totals are expected to shift as case completion occurs. In addition, due to the small sample size in each month, we expect totals to fluctuate from month to month because of random variation. The monthly reports are posted on mainedrugdata.org.

A “drug death” is confirmed when one or more drugs are mentioned on the death certificate as a cause or significant contributing factor for the death. Most drug-induced fatalities are accidents related primarily to drug lethality, the unique vulnerability of the drug user, such as underlying medical conditions, and the circumstances surrounding drug use during that moment.

A “suspected” drug fatality is identified by physiological signs of overdose as well as physical signs at the scene and witness information. To be confirmed as a drug death, the medical examiner must have issued a final death certificate which includes the names of the specific drugs. A forensic toxicology exam must also have been done, which includes a minimum of two toxicology tests, one to screen for drugs present, and another that will quantify the levels of drugs in the decedent’s system. All cases receive a thorough external examination and comprehensive toxicology tests. In some cases, a complete autopsy is also done. Additional data, such as medical records and police incident reports are also collected. Normally cases are completed within one month; however, due to recent problems being experienced by our national toxicology testing service, completion of cases is occurring at about 6–8 weeks after death, and occasionally longer.

By highlighting drug deaths at the monthly level, this report brings attention to the often-dramatic shifts in totals that can occur from month to month. These fluctuations are common with small numbers and will tend toward an average over time. Whereas the overall number of overdose deaths are a critical indicator of individual and societal stress, this metric itself can be quite resistant to public policy interventions due to its complexity. Overdose fatalities occur because of multiple unique and interacting factors, as mentioned above. For that reason, these reports will seek to monitor components that can be directly affected by specific public health education and harm reduction interventions. The statistics in this report reflect both suspected and confirmed “occurrent” deaths, that is, deaths that occur in the State of Maine, even though they may not be Maine residents. These totals also do not include Maine residents who die in other states. For these reasons, totals will differ slightly from the statistics reported by the National Center for Health Statistics, which reports only confirmed “resident” deaths. In addition, due to recently reported updates of toxicology results and newly confirmed or eliminated drug death cases, both the 2021 and 2022 statistics have changed slightly from those reported in the previous monthly report.

¹ The Office of Attorney General supports ongoing research regarding research on fatal overdoses by the University of Maine. Additionally, the Overdose Data to Action cooperative agreement from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention also provides funding to the State of Maine’s Office of Behavioral Health and Maine Center for Disease Control, which also supports university programs involving fatal and nonfatal overdoses surveillance and enables the collection of nonfatal metrics included in this report. The conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.