

2024

# Opioids and the Ongoing Drug Overdose Crisis in Oregon

## Report to the Legislature

### Executive summary

#### Background

This report summarizes the burden of fatal and nonfatal drug overdoses among Oregonians from January – December 2023, as required by ORS 432.141. Some of the data presented in this report may no longer reflect current trends, given how rapidly Oregon’s overdose crisis is evolving. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) presents this information with the acknowledgment that it represents the deaths of people whose loss has an enormous impact on their families and communities.

Nationally in 2023, the number of overdose deaths decreased for the first time since 2018. However, the number of people dying from overdose in Oregon reached a new high in 2023. Oregon has only recently experienced the



dramatic overdose increases that occurred in Eastern and Midwestern states several years ago, primarily driven by the emergence of illicitly manufactured fentanyl into illicit drug markets. Oregon's illicit drug market quickly and regularly changes. The influx of emerging substances and the variability in drug supply exacerbate risk for people who use drugs. Oregon health care systems continue to be heavily affected by overdose-related encounters, including emergency medical services (EMS) encounters, emergency department (ED) visits, urgent care visits, and inpatient hospitalizations. Furthermore, communities who have been disproportionately affected by systemic racism, social-economic-political injustices, and systemic bias continue to experience higher rates of fatal overdose in Oregon.

OHA's strategic approaches for overdose prevention and substance use disorder treatment and recovery are outlined in the [2020-2025 Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission Strategic Plan](#), the [2024-2027 OHA Strategic Plan](#), and the [2020-2024 State Health Improvement Plan, Healthier Together Oregon](#). OHA collaborates with state, regional, local, and Tribal partners to implement these strategies across the substance use continuum.

Preliminary data signify a decrease in fatal and nonfatal overdoses in Oregon from 2023 to 2024. It is too early to determine the reasons for this shift, but some possibilities include increased naloxone availability in the community, a strengthened substance use disorder treatment system, and a shift in the local illicit drug market. It is also too early to determine if this decreasing trend will continue.

While a decrease in overdose morbidity and mortality is notable, Oregon's substance use and overdose rates represent an ongoing and complex public health crisis created by multiple social, economic, and systemic factors. There is no single policy, initiative, or intervention that one agency, sector, or system of the state could implement to fix what has been decades in the making. Addressing this crisis will require a cross-agency, multisector response to simultaneously address the multiple factors contributing to substance use and overdose, including racism, stigma, affordable housing, transportation accessibility, healthcare access, economic opportunity, climate change, and other forms of community-level trauma. Implementing a population health approach that includes both upstream and downstream initiatives can decrease substance use initiation, regular use, and harmful use and promote improved quality of life and well-being among Oregonians.

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**This document is the executive summary of the 2024 Opioids and the Ongoing Drug Overdose Crisis in Oregon Report to the Legislature. [The full report is available online.](#)**

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