

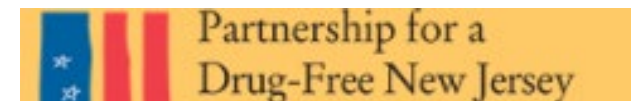
OPIOID USE AND MISUSE IN OLDER ADULTS



**NJ Healthy Aging Summit:
Opioid Safety & Alternatives**
Friday, September 26, 2025

**Donna M. Lisi, PharmD, BCPS,
BCGP, BCACP, BCMTMS, FASCP,
FAAP**

Independent Clinical Pharmacy Consultant
Somerset, New Jersey



Who was He? RIP



RollingStone



MUSIC POLITICS TV & MOVIES (SUB)CULTURE

MUSIC

Tom Petty's Cause of Death: Accidental Overdose

Singer had been taking several pain medications, including Fentanyl and oxycodone, to treat fractured hip and other issues

Tom Petty's cause of death has been revealed as an accidental overdose of prescribed medications.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/tom-pettys-cause-of-death-accidental-overdose-202789/>

"As a family we recognize this report may spark a further discussion on the opioid crisis and we feel that it is a healthy and necessary discussion and we hope in some way this report can save lives. Many people who overdose begin with a legitimate injury or simply do not understand the potency and deadly nature of these medications."

Petty died on Oct. 2, 2017, shortly after finishing a summer tour marking the 40th anniversary of his band, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. **He was 66.**

The family said Petty had "suffered from many serious ailments including emphysema, knee problems and most significantly a fractured hip." They added that on the day he died he had been informed that his hip was, in fact, "a full on break" and the associated pain likely caused his overdose.



The United States Senate Special Committee On Aging

PRESS ROOM

MAY 23, 2018

Seniors Struggling with Opioid Misuse: Senate Aging Committee Examines Opioid Crisis' Effect on Older Americans

HEADLINES

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Unseen face of the opioid epidemic: drug abuse among the elderly grows

May 25, 2018

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2018/05/25/unseen-face-of-the-opioid-epidemic-drug-abuse-among-the-elderly-grows/>

HEALTH

AARP

Alarming Increase in Opioid Overdose Deaths Among Older Adults

Since 1999, more than 80,000 Americans 55 and up have died using these addictive drugs

January 24, 2022

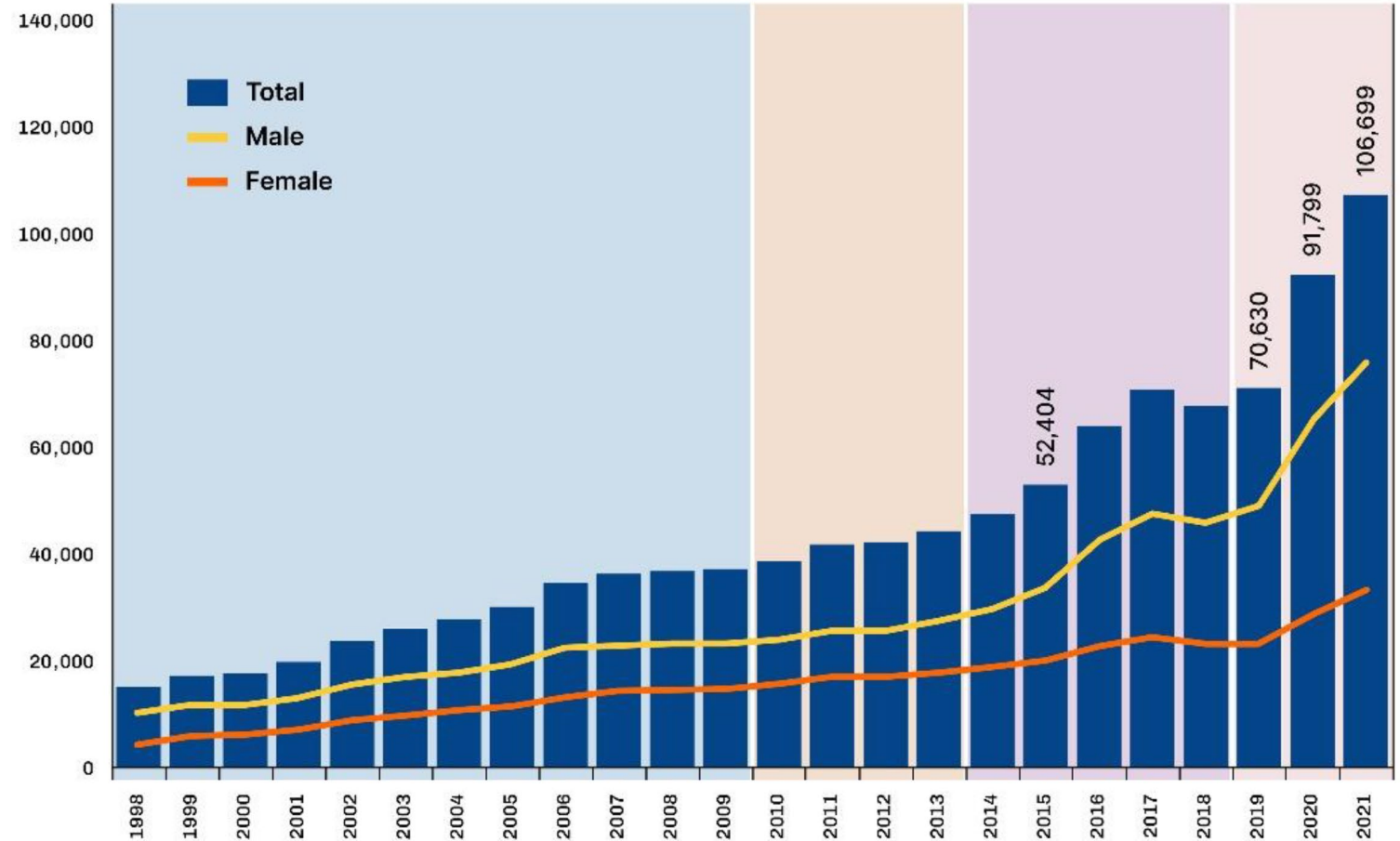
“Consider this: While opioid abuse declined in younger groups between 2002 and 2014, even sharply among those 18 to 25 years old, the epidemic almost doubled among Americans over age 50, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.” (2017)

History

Four waves

- Rx Opioids
- Heroin
- Fentanyl
- Psychostim
+ Fentanyl

National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths



FIRST WAVE (1998–2010)

Rise in Prescription opioid overdose deaths

SECOND WAVE (2010–2014)

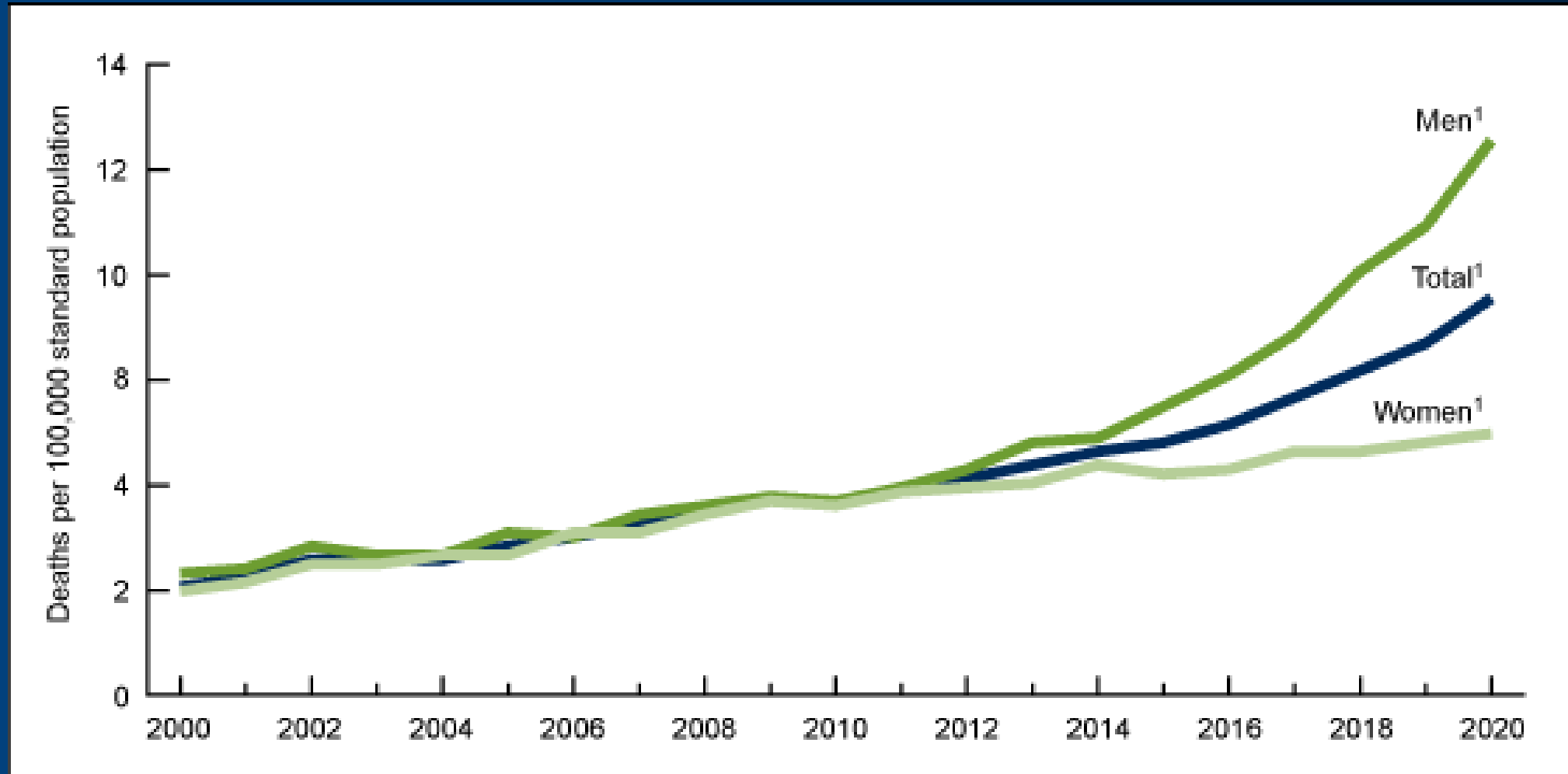
Rise in heroin overdose deaths

FOURTH WAVE (2019–)

Rise in combination of psychostimulant drugs and strong synthetic opioids

THIRD WAVE (2014–2019)

Rise in strong synthetic opioid (e.g. fentanyl) overdose deaths



Age-adjusted drug overdose death rate for adults aged 65 and over, by sex:
United States, 2000–2020



Opioid Use and Overdose Patterns in New Jersey Among Older Adults

New Jersey Overdose Data Dashboard

<https://www.nj.gov/health/populationhealth/opioid/>

Overdose Data Dashboard

This dashboard uses interactive data visualizations to display opioid and other drug-related overdose indicators for public health practitioners, researchers, policy-makers, and the public. Data for these indicators were obtained from multiple sources, including the Department of Health, the Division of Consumer Affairs, the Office of the Attorney General and other law enforcement bodies. Explore the dashboard to learn about the opioid epidemic and other drug-related indicators.

[Give Us Your Feedback](#)

Overdose Prevention Resources

The New Jersey Department of Health is committed to supporting communities in preventing fatal overdose. Below, you can find health information and resources for services and supplies to prevent overdose. If you or a loved one needs naloxone, here is a list of pharmacies with access to free naloxone. You can also text/call 1-877-4NARCAN or [click here](#) to obtain a naloxone kit anonymously, for free, through the mail.

[New Health Alert: Tianeptine \(Updated 9/24/2024\)](#)

[New Flyer - Benzodiazepines: What Are They?](#)

[Health Alert: Xylazine](#)

[Xylazine: What to Know](#)

[Xilazina: Todo lo Que Debe Saber](#)

[Volante - Xilazina: Qué Saber](#)

Quick links to the dashboards

- [Prescription Monitoring Program](#)
- [Naloxone \(Narcan®\)](#)
- [Drug-related Hospital Visits](#)
- [Drug-related Deaths](#)
- [Substance Use Treatment](#)
- [Viral Hepatitis](#)
- [Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome](#)
- [Mortality Data Explorer](#)

New Jersey Prescription Monitoring Program

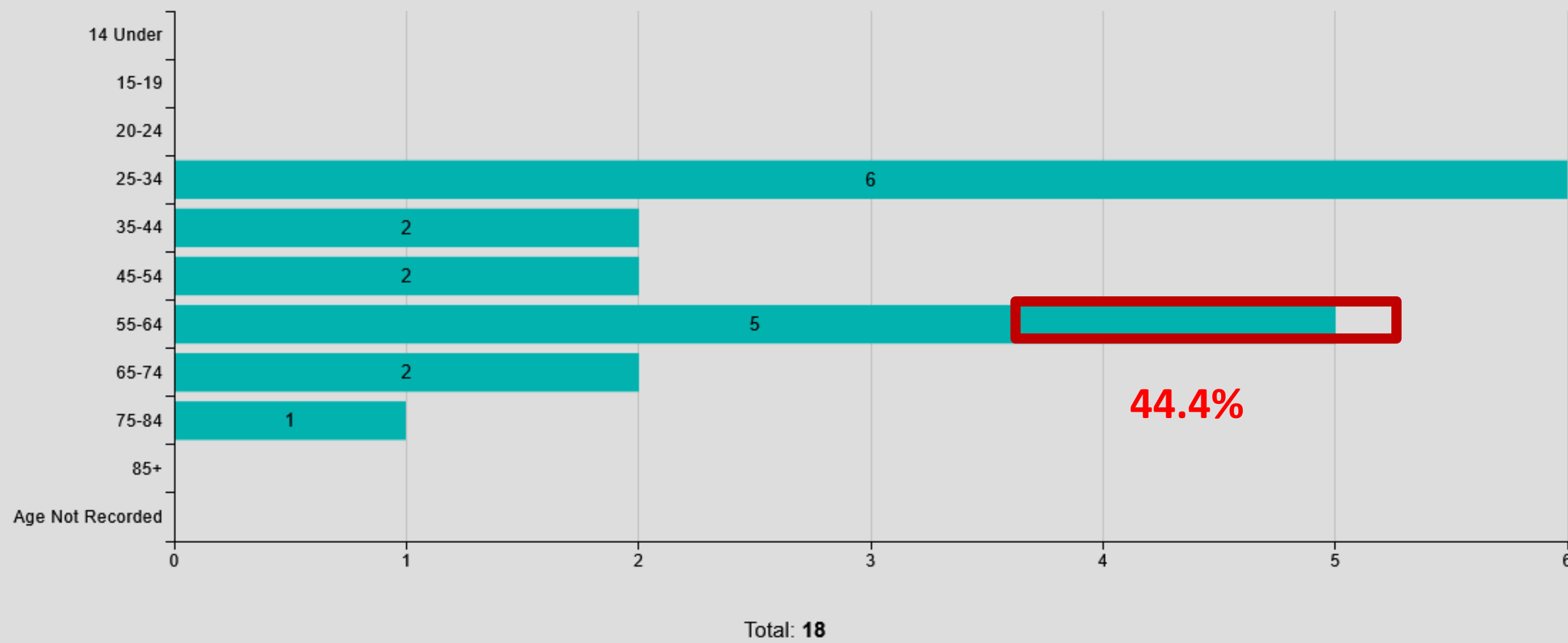
The New Jersey Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) is a statewide database that tracks controlled dangerous substances and human growth hormones dispensed in outpatient settings in NJ and out-of-state pharmacies dispensing into NJ. This tool can be used to reduce prescription drug misuse and diversion by allowing providers to view patients' prescribing histories prior to prescribing medications.

[Open Dashboard](#)

Last Week's Unconfirmed Drug OD Deaths By Age

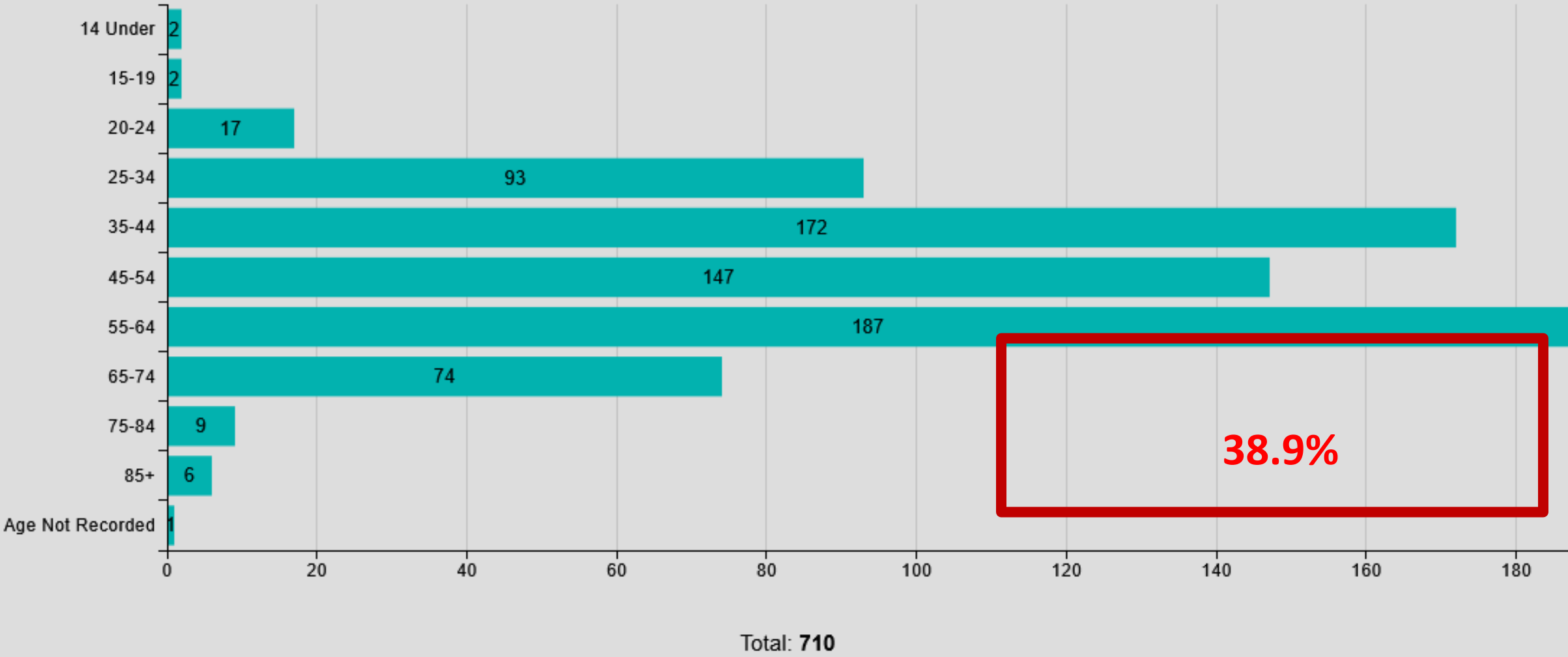
09/01/2025 through 09/07/2025

Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner
General CMS Statistics Suspected Drug Death Statistics

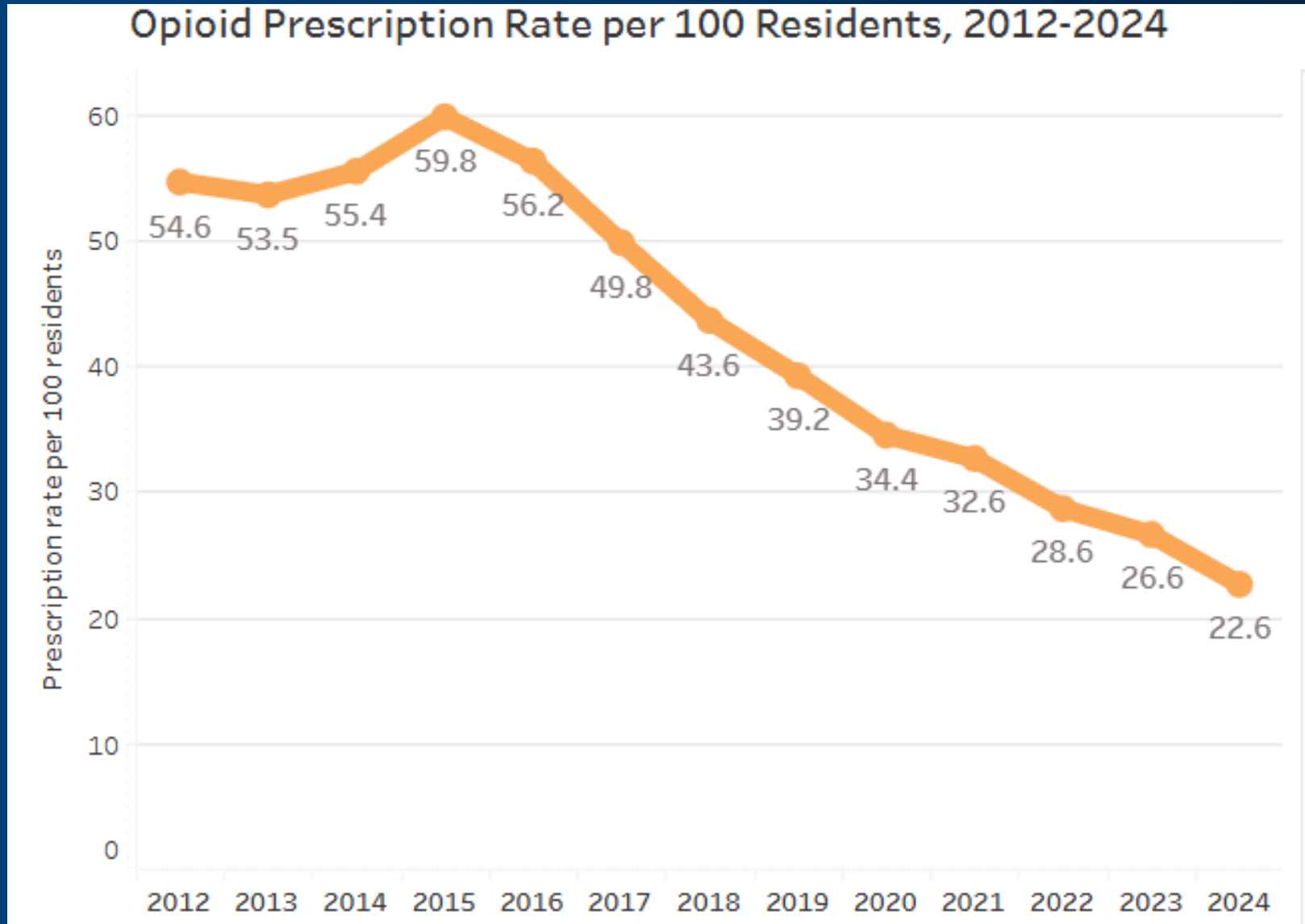


2025 Unconfirmed Drug OD Deaths By Age

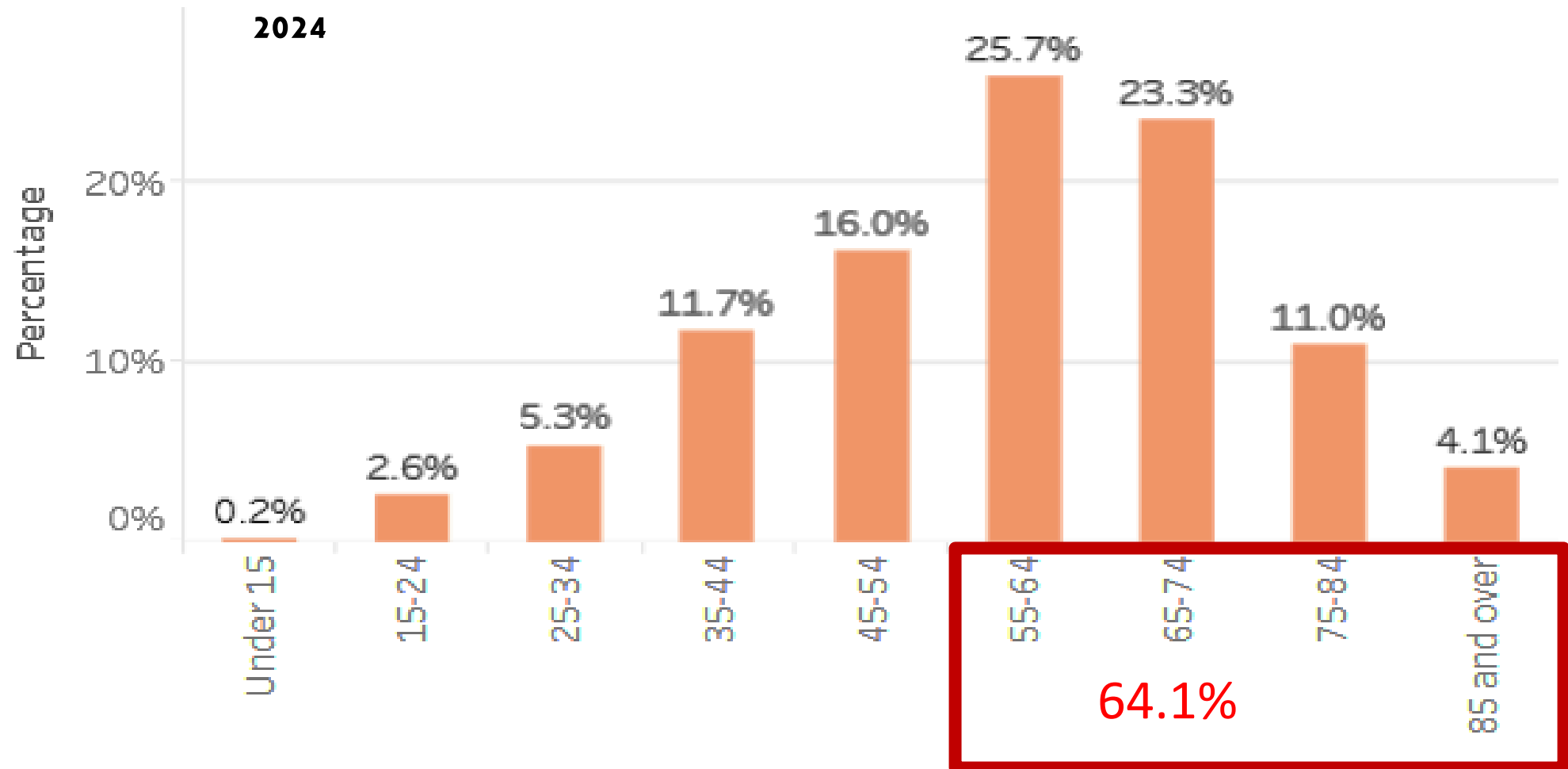
01/01/2025 through 09/06/2025



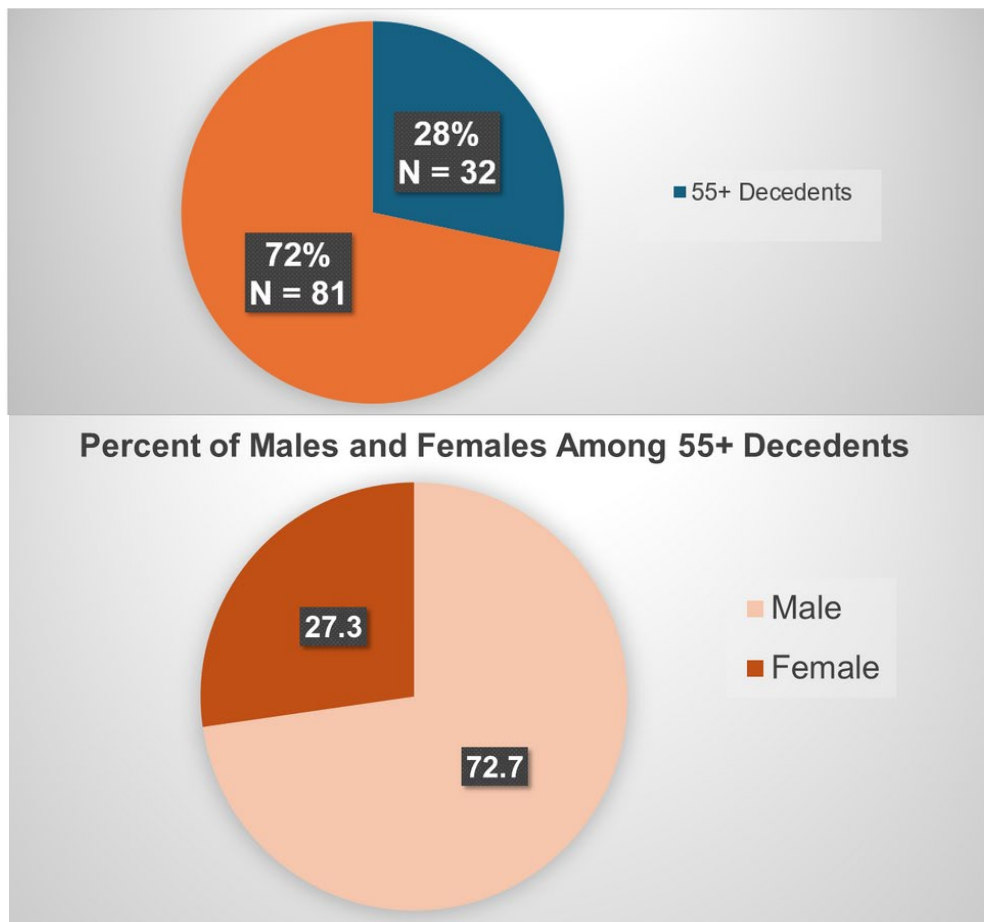
New Jersey Prescription Monitoring Program (NJMP)



Opioid Prescriptions Dispensed by Age Group (in years)



Age 55+ Decedents Comprise 28% of the 113 Completed Overdose Fatality Reviews



Somerset County Overdose Fatality Review

Thank you to:

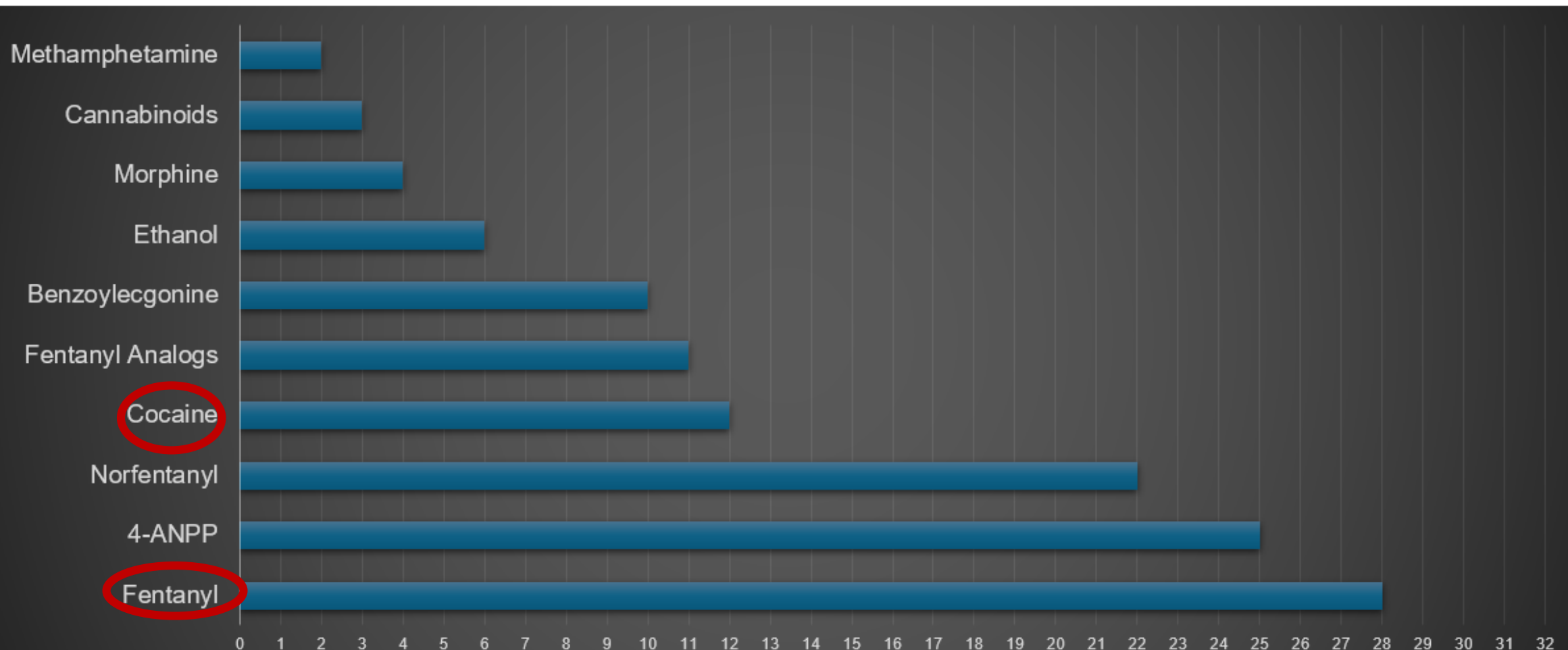
55+ Decedent Graphics for Somerset County Overdose Fatality Review Team

Prepared by Lillian Alexander, LCSW & Cory Morton, PhD

Rutgers Center for Prevention Science

Updated: 2/25/25

Number of Times Common Substances Appeared Across Toxicology Reports Among Age 55+ Decedents (N = 32)





Factors that Increase Opioid Use/Misuse in Older Adults

Factors that Contribute to Opioid Use/Misuse of Opioids in Older Adults

- Multimorbidity associated with pain (e.g., arthritis, cancer)
- Surgical procedures
- Multiple medications that can interact with opioids - benzodiazepines, gabapentin, sedating antihistamines (e.g., diphenhydramine)
- Increased sensitivity to opioid due to changes in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics
- Cognitive impairment (leads to overuse/ falls)
- Underlying respiratory disease (increased risk of respiratory depression)

Factors that Contribute to Opioid Use/Misuse of Opioids in Older Adults

- History of substance use
- Existential pain/ depression/anxiety/ isolation/ loneliness
- Unsafe medication practices- sharing medications with friends/family
- Inappropriate prescribing of opioids/ Failure to try other medications first/ Failure of other pain medications
- Doctor or pharmacy shopping or buying drugs online



What Patients Should Know When Receiving An Opioid Prescription

What older adults say health care providers talked about when prescribing opioid medication AMONG ADULTS AGE 50-80

90%

How often to take it

60%

Side effects

59%

When to reduce the amount

48%

Risk of addiction

43%

Risk of overdose

37%

What to do with leftover pills



July/August 2018 Report: Older Adults' Experiences with Opioid Prescriptions



INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHCARE POLICY AND INNOVATION
NATIONAL POLL ON HEALTHY AGING
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

<https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/reports-more/report/older-adults-experiences-opioid-prescriptions>



DO NOT MIX

**OPIOIDS WITH
ALCOHOL**

**WE KNOW THIS
BUT....**

**And maybe this..
DON'T mix with
Gabapentin or
Pregabalin or
Sedating
Antihistamines
or some Cough
medicines**

**BUT What About
THIS ?.....**

Cannabis Use in Older Adults

- Cannabis poisoning increasing in older adult as observed in Canada based on ED visit. (Stall et al)
- A study from California found that cannabis-related ED visit rate increased significantly for adults aged ≥ 65 and all subgroups ($p < 0.001$). (Han et al)
- Cannabis use that results in ED visit increases dementia risk (Myran et al)
- There are 400 drugs known to interact with cannabis including 28 major and 372 moderate drug-herb interactions (Drugs.com)



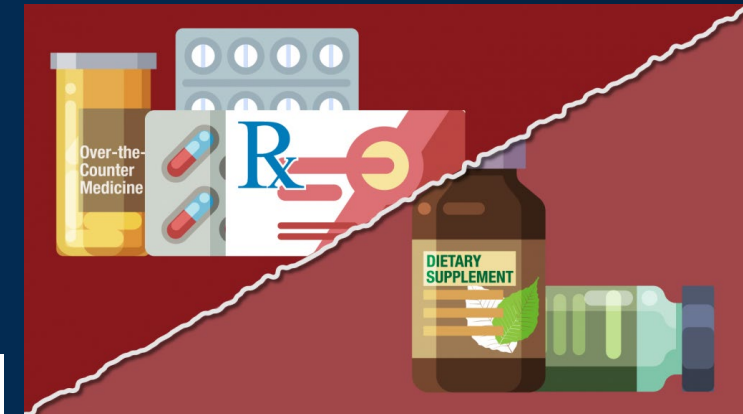
CANNabinoid Drug Interaction Review (CANN-DIR®) is intended to evaluate for potential Drug-Drug Interactions based on the Cannabinoids (THC & CBD) affecting the Metabolism of OTHER concomitantly prescribed medications.

<https://cann-dir.psu.edu/>

Dietary Supplements/ Illicit Substances Interactions

This handout summarizes important interactions between opioids, dietary supplements, and illicit drugs. These combinations can be dangerous. Always consult a healthcare provider before mixing medications or supplements.

Category	Example	Risk
Supplements	St. John's Wort	Can lower opioid levels, causing withdrawal
Supplements	Valerian, Kava, Chamomile	Increase drowsiness and slow breathing
Supplements	Kratom	Acts like an opioid; risk of dependence and seizures
Supplements	CBD / Grapefruit juice	Can raise opioid levels; stronger side effects
Supplements	5-HTP, SAM-e	Can cause serotonin syndrome with tramadol, methadone
Illicit Drugs	Alcohol	Greatly increases risk of overdose and death
Illicit Drugs	Benzodiazepines (Xanax, etc.)	Severe breathing problems and overdose
Illicit Drugs	Cocaine + Heroin (speedball)	Heart problems and fatal overdose
Illicit Drugs	Methamphetamine	Unpredictable, can cause seizures and heart attack
Illicit Drugs	Cannabis (high THC)	More sedation, confusion, accidents
Illicit Drugs	MDMA / Ecstasy	Serotonin syndrome risk with tramadol, methadone
Illicit Drugs	Illicit fentanyl analogs	Extremely potent; high risk of death



Safety Tips for Opioid Use

- Take only as directed for severe pain.
- Severe side effects can occur when taken with benzodiazepines, alcohol, marijuana, other forms of cannabis, or street drugs.
- Do not share medications.
- Keep medications in a safe place.
- Properly dispose of unused medications.
- Have a supply of naloxone readily available and tell family/friends.
- Some are long-acting preparations- do not crush or chew.
- Having respiratory disease increases risk of respiratory depression.
- Make sure that your pharmacist and MD know all your meds and dietary supplements.
- ACCIDENTS happen... be prepared!

Opioid Labeling Changes

- Clearer risk information during long-term use
- Dosing warnings- higher doses associated with increased risk
- Clarified use limits- discourages indefinite use
- Treatment guidance- use short-acting first
- Safe discontinuation – don't stop abruptly
- Overdose reversal- carry naloxone
- Drug interactions- drugs that increase respiratory depression
- More Risks with Overdose- toxic leukoencephalopathy
- Digestive health- problems with esophagus

Consider Non-Opioid Alternatives for Pain

- **Mild to Moderate Pain:** acetaminophen (Tylenol®), nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents (Advil®, Motrin®)
- **Topical analgesics-** diclofenac (Voltaren® gel, lidocaine or capsaicin patches)
- **Adjunctive agents-** duloxetine
- **FDA new guidance (9/10/25) on development of non-opioid pain meds**
- **Non-drug options**
 - Physical therapy
 - Acupuncture
 - Acupressure
 - Chiropractic care
 - Mindfulness and meditation





Storage and Disposal of Opioids

What older adults did with leftover opioid medications*

Among those who had a prescription for opioids in the past two years



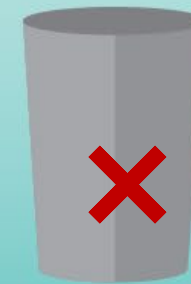
86%

Saved for later use/kept at home



13%

Returned to approved location**



9%

Disposed, threw in trash, or flushed down toilet

July/August 2018 Report: Older Adults' Experiences with Opioid Prescriptions

*Respondents could select more than one response; **Pharmacy, health care provider, law enforcement, or community takeback event



INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHCARE POLICY AND INNOVATION
NATIONAL POLL ON HEALTHY AGING
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

<https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/reports-more/report/older-adults-experiences-opioid-prescriptions>

IMPORTANT PROGRAM UPDATE AS OF 3/31/2025

New pre-paid drug mail-back envelopes are available for safe disposal.

Pre-paid drug mail-back envelopes are another option for safe disposal of unused opioid analgesics, an important component of the Opioid Analgesic REMS. Starting March 31, 2025 the Opioid Analgesic REMS Program Companies are required to provide pre-paid drug mail-back envelopes upon request to pharmacies and other dispensers of opioid analgesics.

[Click here](#) to order pre-paid drug mail-back envelopes.



The Next Take Back Day Is In:

39 12 52 40

Days Hours Minutes Seconds

On October 25, 2025 at 10:00 AM



<https://www.dea.gov/takebackday> **Collection Site Locator**

Enter zip code or County/City/State to see Collection Sites near you. Check back often; sites are added daily.

Zip Code

County

City

State

Search within ? mile radius:





Online Fraudulent Pharmacies



Fake Pills

October 7, 2024: DEA warning - Dozens of fake online pharmacies sold millions of fake pills to customers in all 50 states

???



REAL OR FAKE?

https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/DEA-OPCK_FactSheet_December_2022.pdf

<https://www.safemedicines.org/2024/10/oct-07-2024.html>



Fake Pills

October 7, 2024: DEA warning - Dozens of fake online pharmacies sold millions of fake pills to customers in all 50 states

???

REAL



FAKE



REAL OR FAKE?



https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/DEA-OPCK_FactSheet_December_2022.pdf
<https://www.safemedicines.org/2024/10/oct-07-2024.html>



Before You Buy,

Buying medicine online may **seem** to cost less, but buying from the wrong site can put you, or your loved ones, at risk.

Verify



Use NABP's Safe Site Search Tool to Purchase Medication from Legitimate Websites

Beware of websites and social media platforms selling fake and unsafe prescription medication. Our search tool can help to protect you when ordering medications online. You simply type in the web address to check whether the site is verified or not recommended.

Safe, verified online pharmacies will meet the following requirements:


- Be licensed by regulators
- Accept only valid prescriptions
- Comply with drug and professional practice laws
- Provide readily accessible contact information for patient care inquiries
- Comply with privacy laws and ensure patient confidentiality

To check if a website is safe visit
safe.pharmacy/buy-safely
Using the QT code.
National Association of Boards of
Pharmacy





Naloxone



DESTIGMATIZING NALOXONE AMONG OLDER ADULTS

HAVE THE TALK!!!

A change in a medication, a change in organ function, drinks with friends... it can unintentionally happen!

What are the signs of an opioid overdose?

- 1 Small, constricted "pinpoint pupils"
- 2 Falling asleep or loss of consciousness
- 3 Slow, shallow breathing
- 4 Choking or gurgling sounds
- 5 Limp body
- 6 Discolored skin (especially in lips and nails)

→ www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/patients/Preventing-an-Opioid-Overdose-Tip-Card-a.pdf

https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-resources/pdf/Signs-of-Opioid-Misuse-Opioid-Use-Order-and-Overdose_508.pdf

Most opioids emergencies
happen at home, in front
of a loved one.

www.narcan.com.



https://issuu.com/gsastrategicalliances/docs/staying_safe_with_opioids_at_home?fr=sMzVkZjg0OTgxMTM

Key Points for Pain Therapy

1. Naloxone (also commonly known as the brand name Narcan) is a medication that can be used to restore breathing in people who have overdosed on opioids. When opioids are prescribed, the health care professional should also prescribe naloxone. Consumers can also purchase naloxone without a prescription.
2. To be prepared for a possible opioid overdose, naloxone should always be in the home if prescribed opioids are present or if any family members bring in opioids that were not purchased at a pharmacy.
3. Naloxone works by temporarily reversing the effects of opioids like heroin, fentanyl, and prescription painkillers.
4. When opioids are present in the home, they must be stored properly—safely away from pets, children, and drug-seeking adolescents and adults.
5. If someone appears to be unconscious and is not breathing normally, the life-saving medication naloxone should be administered.
6. Sedation and opioid overdoses are difficult to tell apart. When in doubt, act.
7. Even if a person has been safely taking opioids for a while, an overdose still can occur. The body's responses to opioids can change, doses can be increased, or changes may be made to a different opioid or interacting drug.
8. Naloxone will not hurt a person even if it turns out there wasn't an overdose.

Key Points for Pain Therapy

9. *Lay, spray, and stay* are the basic steps in naloxone rescue.
10. First administer a dose of naloxone, and then call emergency services.
11. It is essential to act quickly, as minutes matter in opioid overdoses. Death or permanent brain damage can occur quickly in someone who is in respiratory failure.
12. A person may need multiple doses of naloxone, especially if fentanyl or other synthetic opioids are involved because these drugs can be stronger and longer-lasting.
13. A person who receives naloxone needs to be evaluated by medical professionals even when naloxone works initially. Additional naloxone doses may be needed to keep the person breathing.
14. This guide contains a decision tree for family members and caregivers, medical professionals, or bystanders in assessing whether an overdose is occurring and when to administer naloxone.
15. June 6 is [National Naloxone Awareness Day](#). Plan activities in your community to promote naloxone awareness and proper ways of using it. Educational materials are available on many websites, including [SafeProject.org](#).

NALOXONE 365

New Jersey's Pharmacy-based Initiative to Provide Naloxone Freely and Anonymously

Opioid addiction and overdoses continue to impact communities throughout New Jersey and across the country at an alarming rate. Since 2018, tens of thousands of New Jerseyans have experienced an overdose and more than 15,000 died of a suspected drug-related death. To combat and curb this epidemic, New Jersey has worked to bolster harm reduction efforts throughout the state including expanding the availability of naloxone through statewide distribution days. In 2023, New Jersey took the next steps to make naloxone readily available every day of the year for free.

In January 2023, Governor Murphy announced a nation-leading program to allow anyone 14 years or older to acquire naloxone anonymously and at no cost at participating pharmacies across New Jersey. The Department of Human Services partnered with the New Jersey Board of Pharmacy and its Medicaid division to craft and implement this unique program.

https://data.nj.gov/Human-Services/Naloxone365-NJ-Free-Naloxone-at-Pharmacies-Program/nfsa-3664/data_preview



Getting Help For Substance Use Disorder in NJ

Drug overdoses spike 11% in older adults - and ageism keeps many from getting help



Provided by Dow Jones • Sep 11, 2025, 12:15:00 PM

By Jessica Hall

Fewer than 40% of Medicare beneficiaries with opioid-use disorders receive proper care, study finds

In 2022, 52,000 Medicare beneficiaries experienced an opioid overdose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- “Addiction screenings don’t happen with seniors. The assumption is made that because they’re older adults, they won’t be abusing. But the rates keep increasing.”
- “People don’t expect older adults to misuse or abuse opioids, and they tend to think the symptoms of overuse are related to aging rather than the drug use itself.”
- “Doctors may approach the situation thinking that the person is going to die anyway, so why bother treating the opioid use disorder?”

<https://www.morningstar.com/news/marketwatch/20250911224/drug-overdoses-spike-11-in-older-adults-and-ageism-keeps-many-from-getting-help>

A teal-colored starburst graphic with a black outline, containing the word "STIGMA" in white capital letters.

STIGMA

**Somerset County Substance
Awareness and Guidance for
Elders Prevention
Collaborative**

Mission:

To share targeted prevention strategies that raise awareness, educate, and provide resources for older adults to reduce the risk of substance use and its associated harms while fostering a supportive, informed community that promotes healthy aging and well-being.

2025

Somerset County

Substance Awareness
and Guidance for Elders
Prevention Collaborative

2ND WED. OF THE MONTH

9:30 - 10:30 AM

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US IN SUPPORT OF HEALTHY
AGING BY PROVIDING PREVENTION, EDUCATION, AND
RESOURCES THAT REDUCE SUBSTANCE USE RISKS FOR
OLDER ADULTS.

Somerset County
Department of
Human Services

In cooperation with: The
Somerset County Board of
County Commissioners



**Behavioral Health
System Navigator**

The BHSN will help any Somerset
County resident navigate and connect
with the mental health and substance
use disorder treatment, prevention,
and recovery support system.



Stephanie Billitz

Office: 908-203-6130

Cell: 908-963-0116

sbillitz@co.somerset.nj.us

Monday-Friday: 8:30am-4:30pm

For psychiatric or medical emergency and residents in crisis, please dial 988 or 911.

Where to Get Help

- Every county has a County Alcohol and Drug Use Director, Mental Health Administrator, and Office on Aging and Disability
- Can look up their respective county CADAD/MHA contact here: [Department of Human Services | County Alcohol and Drug Use Directors & County Mental Health Administrators](#)
- REACH NJ is a 24/7 hotline for addiction treatment- 844-732-2465
- NJ Addiction Services Hotline (IME): 24/7 Assessment Referral Hotline: 844-276-2777
- 988- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline | Text, Call, or Chat 988](#)
- SAMHSA treatment finder option [Home - FindTreatment.gov](#)

Resources

- WISE (Wellness Initiative for Senior Education (WISE) Program (<https://www.njpn.org/wise>): an evidence-based program for older adult that educate on making healthy choices and avoiding substance use disorders
- SAMSHA- Preventing Opioid Misuse and Treating Opioid Use Disorder in Older Adults (<https://www.njpn.org/wise>)
- SAMSHA- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2020. (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 26.)(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/n/tip26v2/pdf/>)
- NIDA- Older Adults (<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/older-adults>)
- ACL- The Opioid Public Health Emergency and Older Adults (<https://acl.gov/programs/addressing-opioid-crisis>)
- AHRQ- Opioids in Adult Adults Compendium (<https://www.ahrq.gov/opioids/implementing-what-works/compendium.html>)
- AHRQ- AHRQ Older Adult Opioid Initiative (<https://integrationacademy.ahrq.gov/about/initiatives/older-adult-opioid-initiative>)

Thank you