

Iowa Department of Public Health
Division of Behavioral Health/Bureau of Substance Abuse
Opioid Update: August 2021

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) offers the Opioid Update to share information about opioid use and Iowa's efforts to address the national opioid epidemic. Please feel free to submit topics to RaChel Greenwood at rachel.greenwood@idph.iowa.gov.

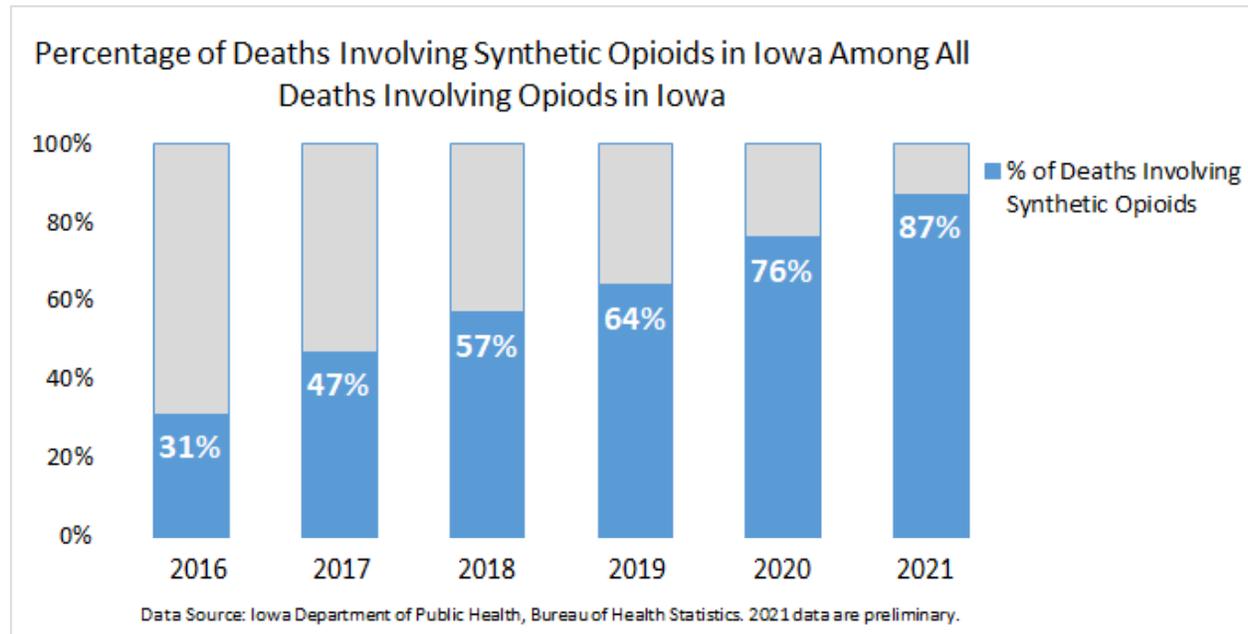
In this issue:

- **Department News**
- **Opioid News**
- **Upcoming Trainings**

Department News

Alarming trends in deaths involving opioids

Recently, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) Bureau of Health Statistics finalized its annual report on the number of deaths involving opioids for 2020. Unfortunately, Iowa experienced an increase in 2020 with 213 deaths involving opioids reported (compared to 157 deaths in 2019). While the COVID-19 pandemic likely played a part in creating an environment for this to occur, it's the role of illicit versions of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl that is most alarming. As outlined in the table below, in 2019, 64 percent of deaths involving opioids involved an illicit/synthetic opioid. In 2020, that percentage increased to 76 percent. And currently, provisional data for 2021 indicates that 87 percent of deaths involving opioids so far this year have involved an illicit/synthetic opioid.



According to Kevin Gabbert, Opioid Initiatives Director at IDPH, “There is a tremendous reason for concern.” Gabbert said, “In most cases, individuals don’t know what they’re using. They can’t visually tell the difference between what they think is heroin, but is actually illicit fentanyl – a substance that can be up to 50 times more potent.”

When asked what can be done to change the trajectory Iowa is currently on and reduce the number of deaths involving opioids, Gabbert said that a “multipronged approach is necessary” that includes:

- Making treatment and recovery support services like transportation available for those that are ready to take this step
- Educating people who use drugs on safe user practices like having someone present when they use, and making sure the person observing has Narcan available and knows how to administer it
- Reducing stigma that potentiates a negative stereotype of people who use drugs and prevents individuals with an opioid use disorder from pursuing help

In a recent change to its long-standing policy, the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) bolstered its efforts to reduce deaths involving opioids by now allowing funding from specific federal grant projects to be used to purchase fentanyl test strips. An effective tool, fentanyl test strips are used by individuals to detect for the presence of fentanyl before they use the substance. Gabbert reported, “Several research studies have concluded that use of fentanyl test strips can significantly modify usage behavior and reduce overdose deaths.”

State Opioid Response (SOR2) Funding Announcement

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) is expanding the State Opioid Response (SOR2) grant. IDPH has created an opportunity to expand the number of providers of covered services with the purpose of reaching more Iowans with a substance use disorder. IDPH is now accepting applications from any eligible provider of covered services for individuals with a stimulant and/or opioid use disorder.

Through funding made available by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), this comprehensive approach allows agencies to be more responsive in meeting the needs of individuals seeking services by providing a continuum of services rather than crisis-oriented care. These services include:

- Medication Assisted Treatment
- Care Coordination
- Peer Recovery Coaching
- Housing Assistance
- Dental Services
- Supplemental Needs

To learn more about this opportunity or to obtain an application, please visit the IDPH MAT Provider Website at <https://idph.iowa.gov/mat/provider>. Applications to provide services will be accepted on an ongoing basis based on service need and funding availability. Please direct any questions to SOR@idph.iowa.gov.

Opioid News

CDC: Drug overdose deaths in 2020 hit highest number ever recorded

Drug overdose deaths rose by almost 30% within the U.S. in 2020, with the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period and the largest increase since 1999. Based on death records submitted to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the provisional data present a disturbing trend. The NCHS further reports that overdose deaths from synthetic opioids (primarily fentanyl), psychostimulants (such as methamphetamine), cocaine and natural and semi-synthetic opioids (such as prescription pain medication) increased in 2020 compared to 2019.

With the exception of South Dakota (that is one of two states indicating a decrease in drug overdose deaths between 2019 and 2020), Iowa had the lowest percent of increase amongst bordering states at 19.7%.

Experts believe this increase is most likely due to the pandemic. As Dr. Volkow, the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) states, "...we are seeing an increase in drug consumption, difficulty in accessing life-saving treatments for substance use disorders, and a tragic rise in overdose deaths."

To read the entire article, please click on this link: [CNN](#). To explore the Rapid Release visualization and more information about these data, please click on this link: [NVSS](#)

Upcoming Trainings

Recovery Coach Training Vouchers

The Iowa Department of Public Health's State Opioid Response (SOR2) grant has collaborated with the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR) to offer vouchers to Iowa residents who are interested in attending CCAR's Recovery Coach Academy (RCA) and Ethical Considerations for Recovery Coaches.

- CCAR Recovery Coach Academy© is a 5-day intensive training academy focusing on providing individuals with the skills needed to guide, mentor and support anyone who would like to enter into or sustain long-term recovery from an addiction to alcohol or other drugs
- Ethical Considerations is a 16 hour training that helps coaches, and anyone else working in the peer role understand how critical it is to be ethically responsible

In order to receive a voucher an individual must commit to attending the entire training and share how they intend to utilize what they've learned. For available training dates and times, please visit the CCAR [website](#).

If interested in obtaining a voucher to attend an available training, or for more information, please contact Sarah Vannice at sarah.vannice@idph.iowa.gov. [1][2][3]