

# OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEWS: A COORDINATED, MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE

A partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Health Services  
and the Wisconsin Department of Justice



## What are Overdose Fatality Reviews?

Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) is a locally-based, multi-disciplinary process for understanding the risk factors and circumstances leading to fatal overdoses and identifying opportunities to prevent future overdoses. The basis of OFR – like all fatality reviews – is that overdose fatalities could have been prevented with the right action, timing, intervention, and/or response.



## What are the goals of OFRs?

The primary goals of OFRs in local communities are to better understand the context of these deaths and to take action to prevent future deaths.

This is accomplished through:

- Recognizing and addressing gaps and barriers in services.
- Identifying underlying causes of substance use disorders.
- Determining prevention strategies targeting opioids and other substances.
- Developing recommendations for policy and program changes at local and state levels.
- Building a community of multi-disciplinary partners to collaborate across agencies.



## Who participates in OFRs?

- Public health
- Coroner or medical examiner
- Emergency medical services
- Law enforcement
- Corrections
- District attorney's office
- Health care
- Behavioral health
- Drug treatment
- Social services



## What is the review process?

An OFR is a systematic process used to examine the underlying causes of overdose fatalities in real time and problem solve. This process includes:

- In-depth case reviews shared by multi-disciplinary partners.
- Timely information sharing and dissemination of findings.
- Identification of risk and protective factors.
- Identification of trends, gaps, and deficits within and across the already existing programs and systems designed to prevent and reduce overdose.
- Actionable recommendations to strengthen these programs and systems.



## How are sites funded and trained?

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services and the Wisconsin Department of Justice co-fund local OFR sites through two grants. Each new site who seeks to implement these OFRs receives:

- Funding for data collection and facilitation of the reviews.
- Training and technical assistance on the development and maintenance of the reviews.

*This material development was funded by the Cooperative Agreement 1 NU17CE010219-01-00 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In addition, this project was supported by Grant No. 2018-PM-BX-K101 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.*

# OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEWS: BACKGROUND AND REPRESENTATION

The overdose epidemic has occurred in three waves in Wisconsin and nationally.

**Wave 1: Prescription opioids**

**Wave 2: Heroin**

**Wave 3: Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids**

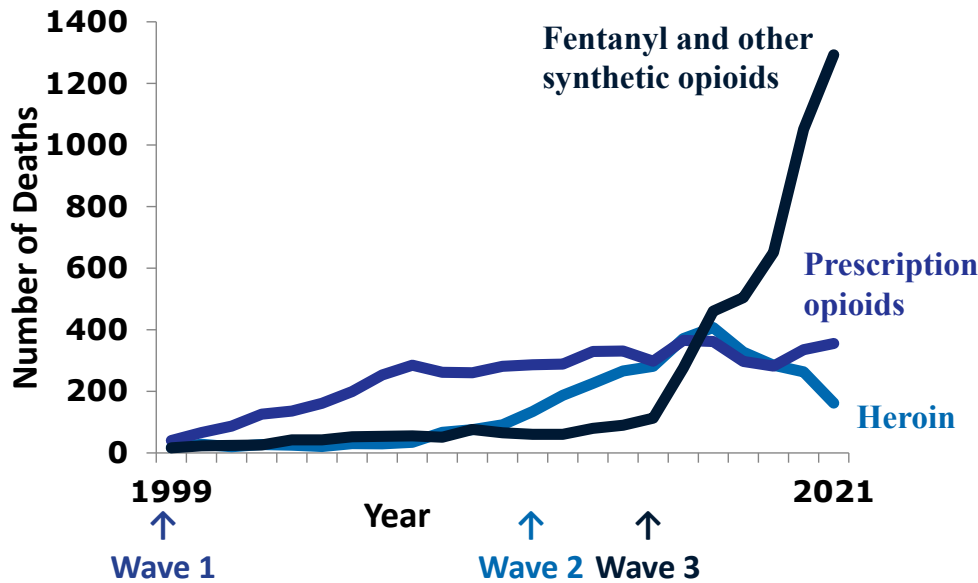
**Prescription opioids** drove the first wave of increased overdose-related deaths, beginning in 1999 and following the increase of opioid prescriptions to treat pain during the 1990s.

**Heroin** drove the second wave, beginning in 2010 because it was easier to access and cheaper than prescription drugs.

**Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids** have driven the third wave of overdose-related deaths since 2014 because they are often mixed into other substances.

Opioids have dominated the first three waves of drug-related overdose deaths; there is a 'fourth wave' of high mortality involving fentanyl and a stimulant such as cocaine and/or methamphetamine.

Wisconsin Opioid Deaths, 1999-2021

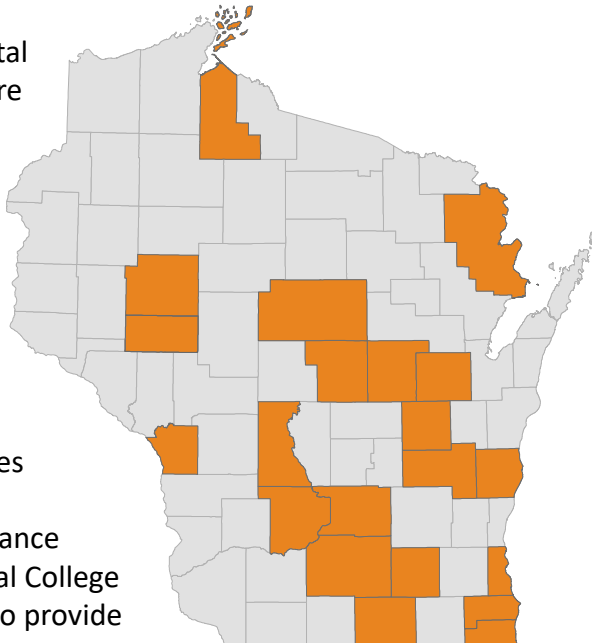


Sources: CDC, Wisconsin DHS

## Wisconsin Overdose Fatality Reviews

OFR sites are primarily local counties and total 25 sites. Both urban and rural populations are represented. The local agency leading OFR also varies, although most sites are led by the local public health department.

The OFR program is a collaborative effort of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ). It is funded through Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Overdose Data to Action for States (OD2A-S) and Bureau of Justice Assistance Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) grants. The Medical College of Wisconsin is contracted by DHS and DOJ to provide training and technical assistance to the local OFR teams.



## County Sites

Ashland	Marinette
Chippewa	Milwaukee*
Columbia	Outagamie
Dane	Portage
Eau Claire	Racine
Fond du Lac	Rock
Jefferson	Sauk
Juneau	Sheboygan
Kenosha	Waupaca
La Crosse	Winnebago
Marathon	

\*Also includes local health department teams for Greenfield, North Shore, West Allis, and South Shore (Oak Creek, Cudahy, South Milwaukee/St. Francis.)

