

# Widening Racial Disparities Among Black Michigander Residents in Drug Overdose Morbidity & Mortality

Michigan 2024

This is a special report; released once.



## Key Findings

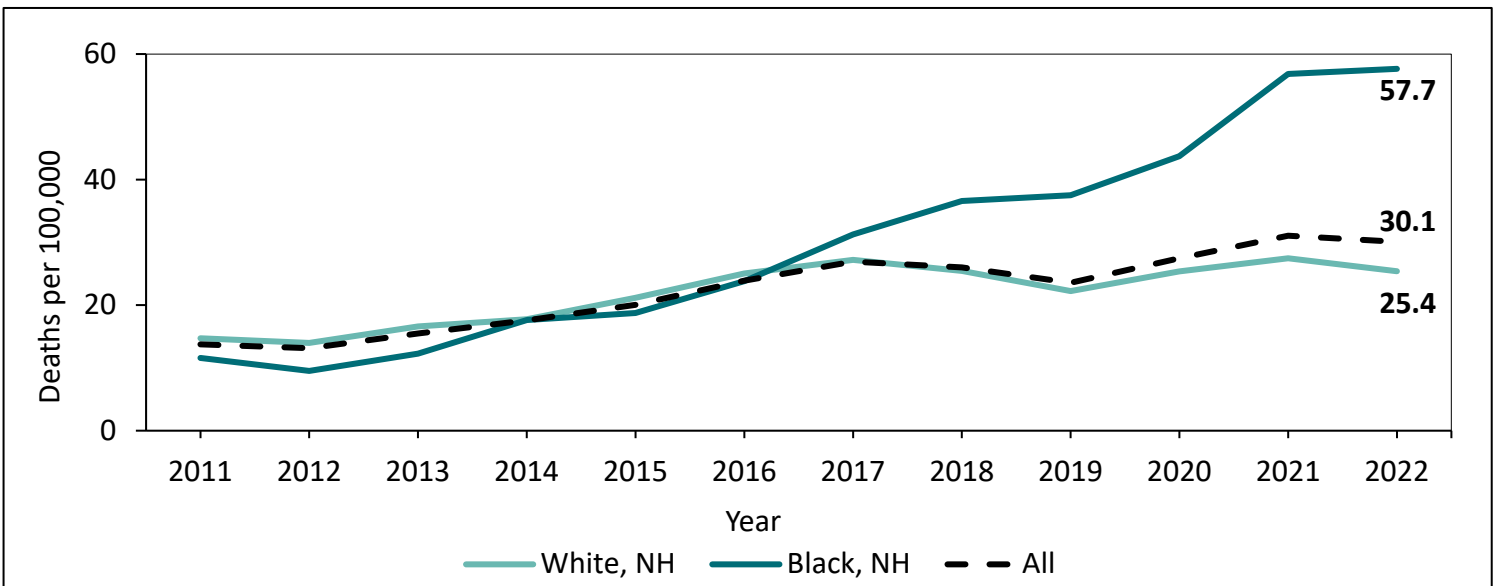
- The rate of fatal drug overdoses is **higher among Black, non-Hispanic (NH) residents** compared to white, NH residents.
- The rate of drug overdoses resulting in an emergency department visit is **higher among Black, NH residents** compared to white, NH residents.

## Background

Communities of color have long been disproportionately impacted by the drug overdose crisis, both in Michigan, and across the United States.<sup>1,2</sup> This is due to several factors, including structural racism and mass incarceration.<sup>3</sup> For example, Black Americans are more likely to live in poverty and to have less access to quality healthcare, making it difficult to get treatment for substance use disorder (SUD).<sup>4</sup> Black Americans are disproportionately incarcerated compared to white Americans, leading to separation from support systems, social stigma, and limited employment and housing prospects after release. These factors can significantly increase the risk for substance use disorders (SUDs) and overdose.<sup>3</sup> Despite this need, syringe service programs (SSPs), which provide a range of harm reduction services that mitigate overdose risks are predominantly utilized by white individuals.<sup>4</sup>

## Mortality Overdose Data

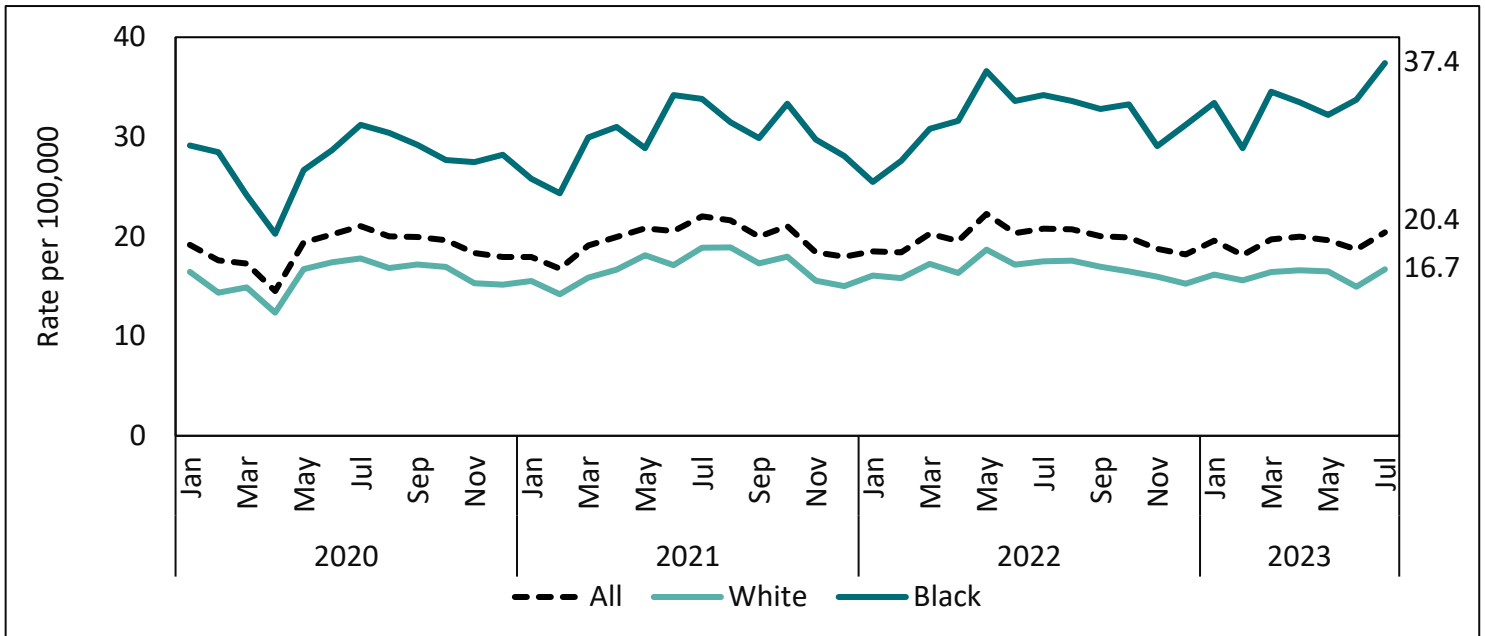
Figure 1. Drug Overdose Death Rate by Race & Ethnicity per 100,000 Michigan Residents, 2011-2022



Since 2017, the mortality rate of all drug overdose deaths among **Black, NH residents** has surpassed that of **white, NH residents**, with deaths increasing most sharply from 2020 to 2021. The mortality rate of all drug overdose deaths in the year 2022 among **Black, NH residents (57.7 per 100,000)** is **more than twice** that of **white, NH residents (25.4 per 100,000)** and the highest rate seen since at least 2011.

## Emergency Department Overdose Data

Figure 2. Monthly Rate of All Drug Overdose ED Visits per 100,000 Michigan Residents by Race (All, White, Black), January 2020 - July 2023



In July 2023, the monthly rate of all drug overdose ED visits was **37.4 per 100,000 for Black residents**, the highest rate since at least January 2020 and **over double the rate for white residents at 16.7 per 100,000**.

## Summary

In 2022, the rate of fatal drug overdose among Black, NH residents **was twice as high** as white, NH residents. Black, NH residents are also **more likely to experience nonfatal overdoses**, with July 2023 marking the highest rate of drug overdose ED visits among Black, NH residents since January 2020.

## Next steps

These findings are concerning and highlight the need for action. The following steps to **address racial disparities in overdoses** come from the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and are further supported by peer reviewed research<sup>6,7</sup>:

- 1) Invest in communities affected by discriminatory policies (e.g., making harm reduction accessible).
- 2) Support diversion from arrest and incarceration.
- 3) Develop campaigns to reduce stigma around substance use.
- 4) Involve community members with diverse backgrounds in policy-making.
- 5) Connect individuals with SUD treatment and medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) during and post carceral release.

To engage Black residents in **SSP access**, studies suggest the following:

- 1) Hire staff with diverse backgrounds.<sup>8</sup>
- 2) Increase the number of SSP locations and available hours to reach a more diverse population.<sup>9</sup>
- 3) Maintain anonymity of clients (e.g., do not record names).<sup>10</sup>

**Need Support Now?** If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 1-800-662-4357 for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline.

## Literature References

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10. Broz, D., Carnes, N., Chapin-Bardales, J., Des Jarlais, D. C., Handanagic, S., Jones, C. M., ... & Asher, A. K. (2021). Syringe services programs' role in ending the HIV epidemic in the US: why we cannot do it without them. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 61(5), S118-S129.

## Data Notes

### Overdose in the Emergency Department

#### **Data source:**

- Michigan Syndromic Surveillance System (MSSS) and Emergency Department (ED) visits.
- Rates are per 100,000 Michigan residents, referencing CDC WONDER Bridged-Race Population Estimates (2020).

#### **Case definitions:**

- The following ICD-10-CM codes were used to identify all drug overdoses by diagnosis code: T36-T50, restricted to initial visits, regardless of poisoning intent.

#### **Notes/Limitations:**

- Race/ethnicity groups were limited to Black, NH and White, NH due to low counts for other race/ethnicities.
- Coverage of ED data in Michigan is high (99% of ED visits, 143 facilities reporting with “enhanced feeds”).
- A person could appear in the dataset multiple times if they experienced multiple overdoses because MSSS is deidentified.
- Analysis relies on diagnostic code data, which can improve standardization compared to relying on chief complaint field. However, not all Michigan EDs report diagnostic codes to syndromic surveillance, and there is variation in how diagnoses are assigned by physicians.
- In 2020, about 92% of ED visits came from facilities with 'enhanced' feeds, which include ICD-10-CM diagnostic code data; in 2021, about 97% of ED visits came from facilities with 'enhanced' feeds; from 2022-23, about 99% of ED visits came from facilities with 'enhanced' feeds.
- Race and ethnicity information in syndromic data has become more complete in recent years, with the proportion of records with incomplete data decreasing from 11.4% in 2020 to 3.6% in 2023 YTD.

### Mortality Overdose

#### **Data Sources:**

- 2011-2022 Mortality: Finalized Michigan Resident Death files, Office of Vital Records and Health Statistics, MDHHS.

#### **Case Definitions:**

- All Drug overdose deaths: Underlying cause of death contains any of the ICD-10 codes: X40-44, X60-64, X85, Y10-Y14.

#### **Notes/Limitations:**

- Limited to MI residents.
- Race/ethnicity groups were limited to Black, NH and White, NH due to low counts for other race/ethnicities.

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**MORE DATA AVAILABLE:**

For more data and information on substance use disorder and overdose, go to [Michigan.gov/OpioidsData](https://Michigan.gov/OpioidsData)