Mental Health Disorders and Fatal Overdoses, 2020-2024

Overview

Understanding circumstances preceding fatal overdoses among those with a mental health disorder (MHD) can help providers intervene for those most at risk. This document examines circumstances surrounding unintentional fatal overdoses in Indiana from 2020-2024 for those with and without an MHD.[1]

Prevalence of MHD Among Overdose Decedents

People with MHDs have an elevated risk of experiencing an overdose.[2] Among people who died of an unintentional overdose in Indiana from 2020-2024, one in 10 (10.1%) had evidence of an MHD.[3] Depressive and anxiety disorders were the most common diagnoses (Figure 1).

Opportunities to Intervene

From 2020-2024, 22% of overdose decedents with an MHD and 10% of decedents without an MHD had an opportunity to intervene within a month of death. The percentage of decedents with an MHD that had an opportunity to intervene within a month of death increased from 2019-2023 (19%). A higher proportion of decedents with an MHD than without were currently receiving treatment for MHD or SUD or had been released from any institution,[4] experienced a nonfatal overdose, or visited an emergency department in the month prior to death (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Prevalence of mental health disorders among persons who died from unintentional overdose, Indiana 2020-2024

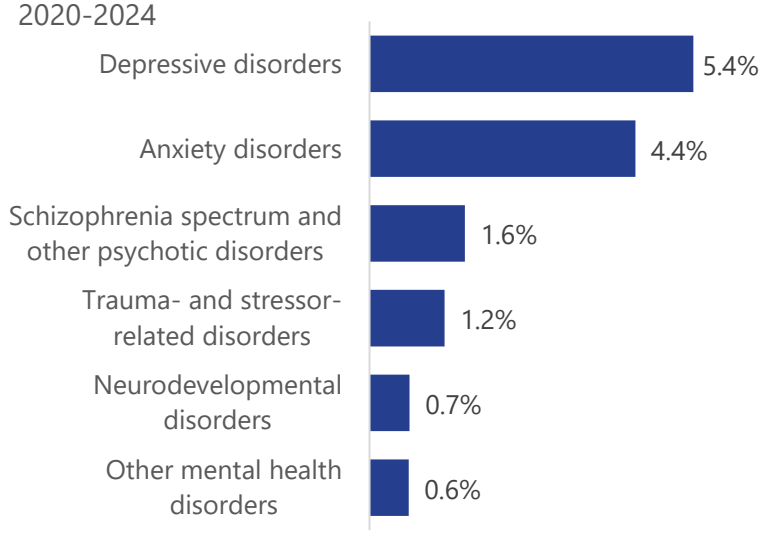
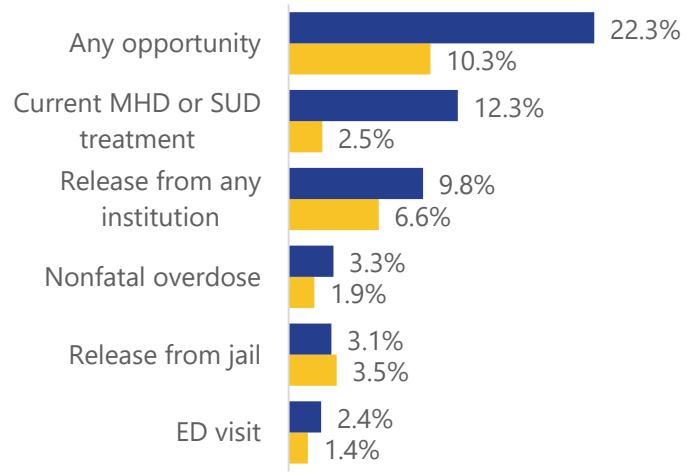


Figure 2. Opportunities to intervene within a month prior to fatal overdose for decedents **with** (top, blue) and **without** (bottom, yellow) an MHD (2020-2024)



[1] This report reflects fatal drug overdose data from Indiana's State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS). Data in this report reflect finalized SUDORS data for 7,394 fatal overdoses that occurred in Indiana in 2020-2024, were deemed unintentional or of undetermined intent, and had sufficient evidence available. MHDs are reported according to evidence of diagnoses in available source documents. The prevalence of MHDs may be underestimated due to undiagnosed MHDs and varying completeness of source documents.

[2] van Draanen J, Tsang C, Mitra S, et al. Mental disorder and opioid overdose: a systematic review. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol*. 2022;57(4):647-671. doi:10.1007/s00127-021-02199-2

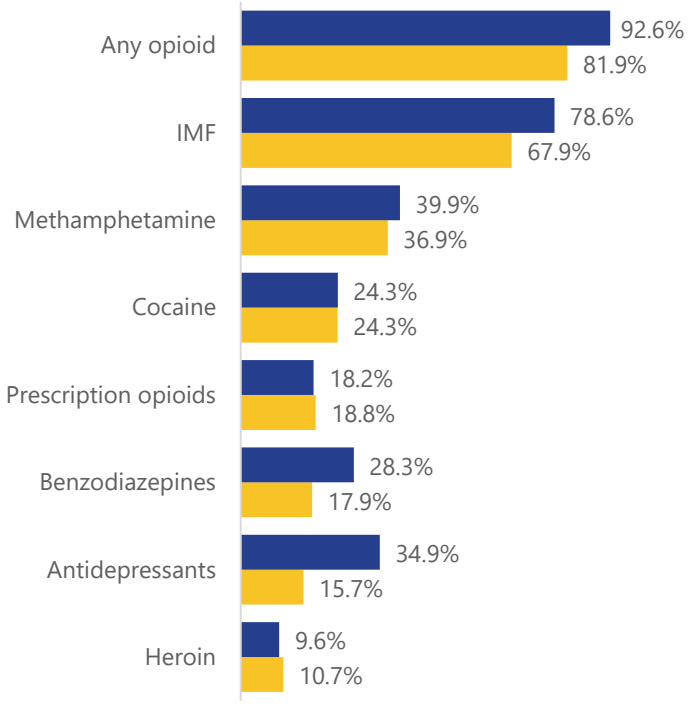
[3] Mental health disorders were categorized according to classification in *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.).

[4] Institutions include hospitals and correctional, psychiatric, residential health, and residential treatment facilities.

Substances Involved

Among overdose decedents both with and without MHD, opioids and illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF) were present in approximately nine out of 10 overdoses and two out of three overdoses, respectively. However, other substances involved in fatal overdoses varied between decedents with and without evidence of an MHD. A higher proportion of decedents with MHDs than without MHDs had positive toxicology results for benzodiazepines (28.3% vs 17.9%) or antidepressants (34.9% vs 15.7%).

Figure 3. Substances involved in fatal overdoses for decedents **with** (top, blue) and **without** (bottom, yellow) an MHD (2020-2024)



Prevention

These findings highlight the need for integrating care and treatment for MHDs and SUDs. Possible approaches to prevent overdoses among people who use drugs and have an MHD include:

- Screening ED patients for both SUDs and MHDs. ED visits involving mental health may be opportunities to screen individuals for substance use and connect them to care prior to experiencing an overdose. Similarly, those visiting the ED for nonfatal overdose may be screened for an MHD.
- Performing screenings for SUDs and MHDs prior to prescribing medication, especially benzodiazepines and antidepressants, to identify those with comorbid conditions or who may require referrals to care.
- Providing linkages to care and treatment following releases from correctional, hospital, and treatment facilities.

Additional Information

- For additional Indiana drug overdose data, visit: https://www.in.gov/health/overdose-prevention/overdose-surveillance/
- For more information on SUDORS, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/about-sudors.html

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