

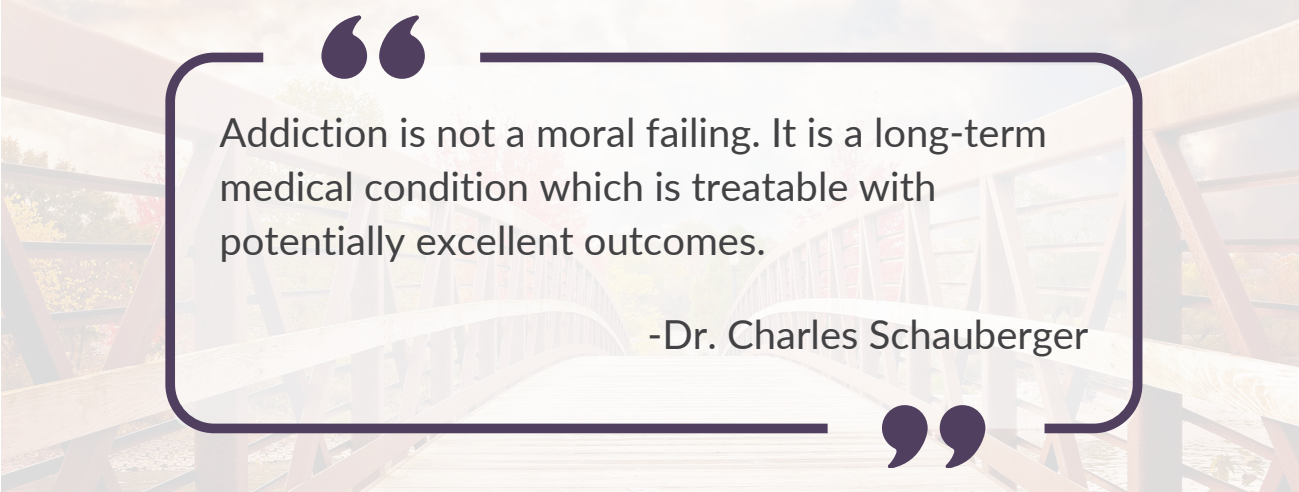
2024 Annual Report

La Crosse County Overdose Fatality Review



LA CROSSE COUNTY
Health Department
Nationally Accredited

La Crosse County Overdose Fatality Review Team



“
Addiction is not a moral failing. It is a long-term
medical condition which is treatable with
potentially excellent outcomes.

-Dr. Charles Schauberger
”

The La Crosse Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) Team, which meets monthly, has been working over the last six years to understand and prevent overdose deaths that occur within La Crosse County. The OFR team is made up of various partners to include law enforcement, social services, healthcare, emergency services, and public health. Our OFR team works hard to review every overdose death that occurs in La Crosse County. We recognize drug overdose deaths are preventable. We seek to understand, create community change to prevent overdose deaths and raise awareness of this ongoing epidemic.

Over the last decade, the La Crosse County community has been working to decrease the impact of drug overdoses. The drug overdose trend is a growing problem nationwide and locally. When looking at opioid deaths, La Crosse County has a lower rate than Wisconsin and the nation. While this is a good sign that shows some of our prevention efforts have been helping our community, we still have work to do to reverse this trend and reduce the number of lives lost.

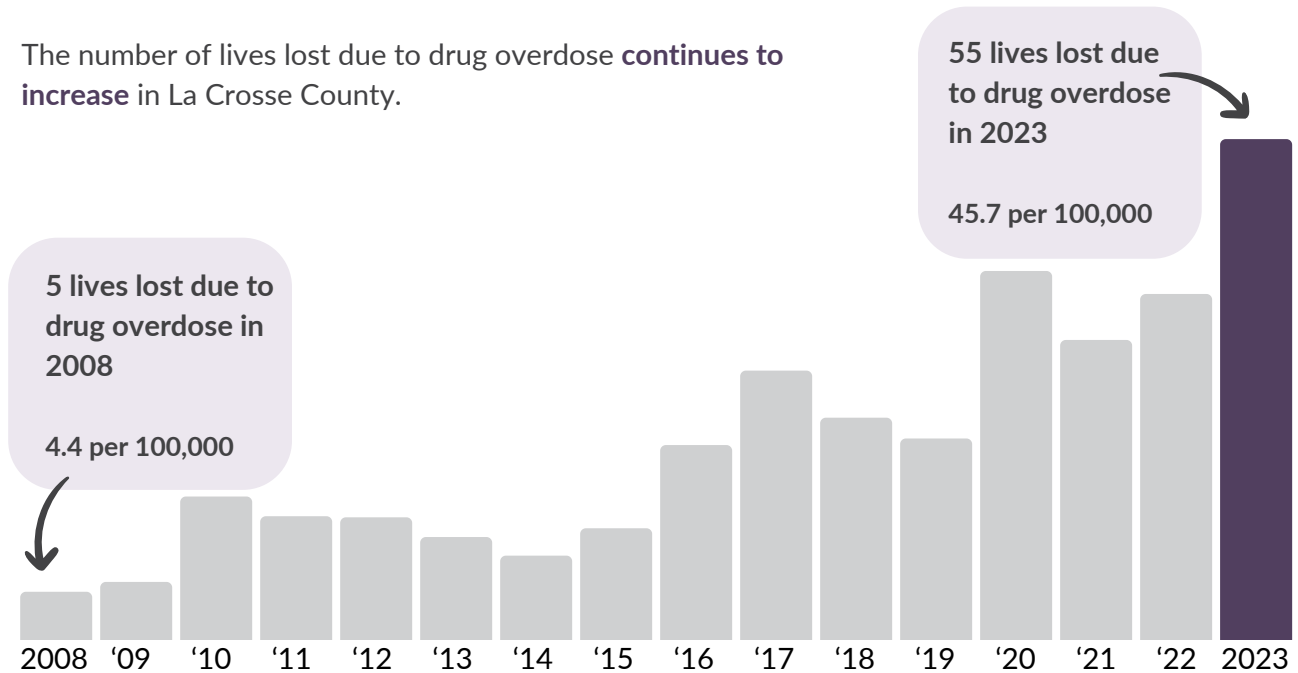
This report includes data and information about the people who died within La Crosse County from an accidental drug overdose. Each number within this report represents a member of our community lost to addiction. We continue to remember those we've lost and honor their lives.

Data Trends

The data in this section comes from the La Crosse County Medical Examiner's office. This highlights overdose deaths in our community and shows how substance use and the opioid epidemic has impacted La Crosse County.

How many lives were lost?

The number of lives lost due to drug overdose continues to increase in La Crosse County.



How many substances are involved?

75%

of people who lost their life due to a drug overdose had more than one substance in their system at the time of death

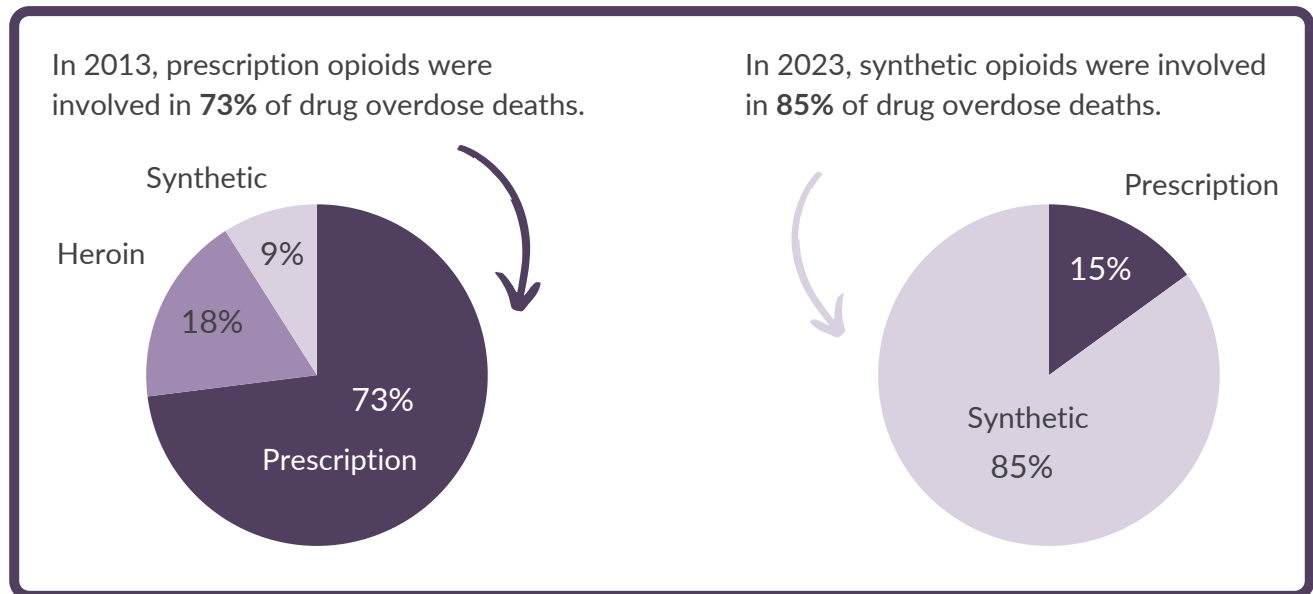


Many substances can contribute to an overdose death. It is common to see multiple drugs being used together.

This combination could be alcohol and cocaine together. Or it could be a drug laced with another unknown drug.

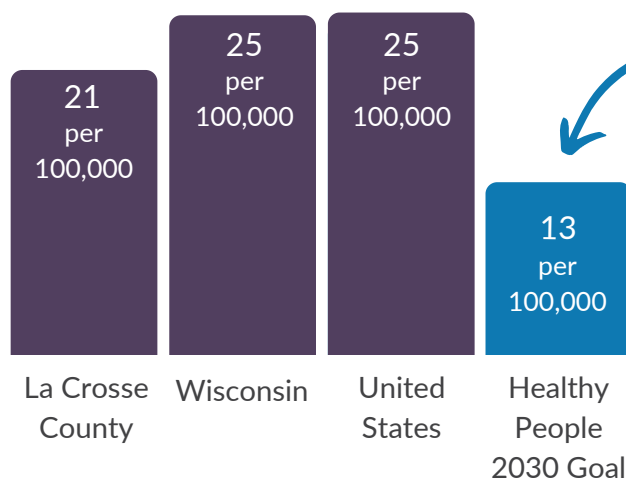
What type of opioids are involved?

Opioids are a main contributor to drug overdose deaths. The type of opioid involved in overdose deaths has shifted in the last 10 years. Synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, are now more common in overdose deaths.



How much does this impact our community?

In 2022, La Crosse County had fewer lives lost due to an **opioid overdose** when compared to Wisconsin and the United States.



The **goal** is to decrease the number of lives lost from an opioid overdose. Healthy People 2030 sets the goal at 13 per 100,000.

Across the nation, there is work yet to be done to reduce the number of lives lost.

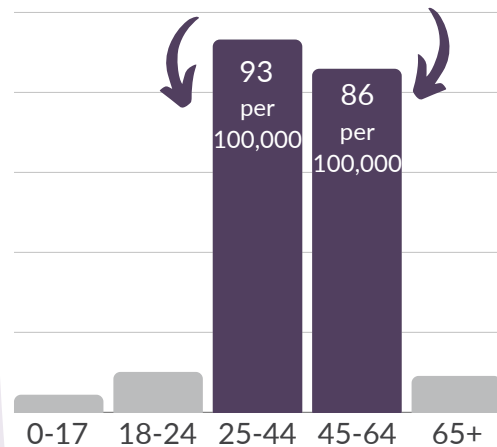
Characteristics

There are many misunderstandings about who can be affected by overdose. Below are some characteristics of people who have lost their lives to overdose in La Crosse County. Substance use can impact anyone regardless of their age, gender, or social circumstances.

Over the last ten years, overdose deaths occurred more often in males.



Lives lost to drug overdose are most common in people ages 25-64.



73%

of people who lost their life to an overdose had permanent, stable housing



4 out of 5

people who lost their life to overdose had a high school education or higher



Insights

After reviewing overdose deaths, the OFR team creates recommendations as a means to help prevent future overdoses. From these recommendations, 4 overarching themes have been identified.

“

In a way, stigma is the leading cause of death in this country. And the biggest thing is most families don't understand that this could easily happen to them

-La Crosse County Parent

”



Reduce Stigma

Stigma for people who use substances or have mental health conditions means they face unfair treatment and negative attitudes from others. This can make them feel alone and less likely to get the help they need, making their problems worse and keeping them from living a full life. Stigma is not true or fair, but it still hurts.

What we all can do:

- Ask workplaces, local businesses or organizations that you are involved with to offer additional trainings to **build more understanding**.
- Change how we talk about addiction to provide a more **accepting** space for everyone seeking resources and help.
- Talk to young people early on to help them make healthier choices and **reduce the stigma** around addiction and mental health.
- **Talk to your family and friends** about how to de-stigmatize addiction and mental health.
- Raise mental health **awareness and advocate** for more access to care.



Understand Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is used to help reduce the negative effects of everyday legal and illegal behaviors without requiring people to completely stop. It recognizes that although not everyone is able or willing to stop these behaviors, they are still able to make positive changes to help protect themselves and others. At its core, harm reduction is about compassion and understanding. Harm reduction practices are used every day, like wearing seat belts and using sunscreen.

What we all can do:

- Educational materials and outreach efforts on safer drug use should include:
 - The promotion of **Never Use Alone, 1-877-696-1996**. This free, national hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Encourage those that find themselves using drugs alone to call.
 - **Use test strips** and know what's in your drugs. Knowing can make all the difference and save lives. Protect yourself and others by testing all types of drugs for the presence of other substances.
 - **Stay informed** on current trends and ways to keep yourself and loved ones safe.



Increase Bystander Response

Teaching community members to recognize signs of overdose and providing tools to take action can help reduce overdose deaths in our community.



18%

of emergency calls relating to a drug overdose in 2022 had a bystander that administered Naloxone

What we all can do:

- **Call 911 immediately** if you suspect an overdose - taking action is crucial
- Know how to administer **rescue breaths**.
- **Narcan® (Naloxone):**
 - Carry Narcan® (Naloxone) - It is legal to possess without a prescription
 - Provide public Narcan® training alongside CPR and AED training
 - Ensure Narcan® is accessible in public places
 - Expand overdose education and Narcan® access, encouraging friends and family of individuals using illicit substances to have Narcan® easily accessible.



Foster Community Connections

Building strong community connections helps people feel less alone and more capable of overcoming their difficulties. Disruption of services and increased isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic may have played a role in the rise of overdose deaths. It's important to keep strengthening community connections to help promote better outcomes for everyone.

“The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, the opposite of addiction is connection.”
-Johann Hari-

What we all can do:

- Remember that **words matter** - use respectful and non-judgmental language
- Understand that each person’s path to and through **recovery is unique** to them
- **Advocate** to community leaders and organizations to provide more resources
- **Be kind** - one person can make the difference in someone’s life.

What is being done?

The Overdose Fatality Review Team actively works with the Alliance to Heal to implement recommendations found from the reviews. Below is a snapshot of some recommendations the coalition is working on in 2024.

Bystander Impact

Increase public access to Narcan and provide bystander education on recognizing an overdose and the importance of calling 911.

Harm Reduction

Identify and implement a safety plan and resources for people being released from jail. The plan will include follow up and connection to services after release.

Community Connection

Increase capacity and utilization of peer recovery coaches. The coaches provide connection and mentor capability.

Where can I find more information?

While this epidemic can be overwhelming, there are ways everyone can get involved, learn more and support the work being done in the community. Together we can make a difference.

Information about the data in this report

- **Wisconsin Department of Health Services**
 - www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids/deaths-county.htm
- **Healthy People 2030**
 - www.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/injury-prevention/reduce-overdose-deaths-involving-opioids-ivp-20
- **La Crosse County Medical Examiner**
 - www.lacrossecounty.org/medical-examiner/statistics

Connect with help

- **2-1-1:** Call 2-1-1 or visit 211.org at 211wisconsin.communityos.org/addiction-helpline
- **Community Link:** visit communitylink.findhelp.com

Get Involved

- **The Alliance to HEAL** at www.alliancetoheal.com

Learn how to save a life

- Access our **Harm Reduction Toolkit** and learn how you can save lives.



We all have a role in preventing overdose deaths.

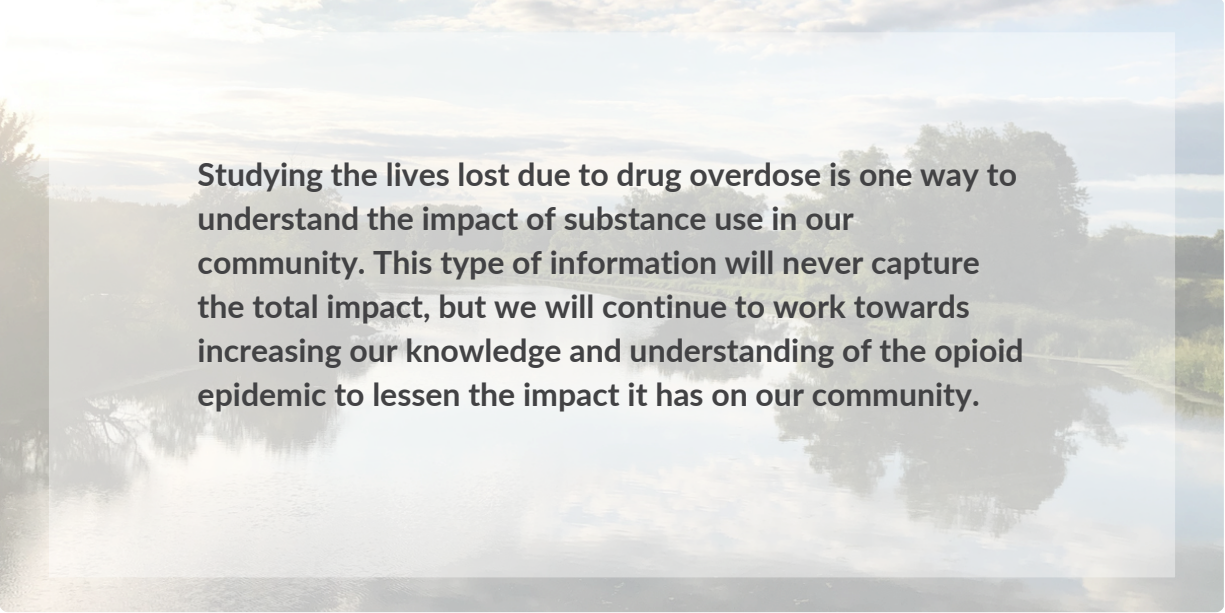
Reducing stigma, understanding harm reduction, increasing bystander response, and fostering community connections are crucial for building a robust recovery system.

By creating an environment where recovery resources are accessible, we empower individuals to take steps toward healing as soon as they are ready.

Thank You

Thank you to the members of the La Crosse County Overdose Fatality Review Team for your continued support and dedication.

La Crosse County Health Department
La Crosse County Human Services Department
La Crosse County District Attorney's Office
La Crosse County Circuit Court
La Crosse County Medical Examiner's Office
La Crosse Police Department
La Crosse County Sheriffs Department
Onalaska Police Department
Holmen Police Department
Campbell Police Department
Bangor Police Department
West Salem Police Department
City La Crosse Fire Department
Emplify Health by Gundersen Health System
Addiction Medical Solutions of Wisconsin
Independent Living Resources
Salvation Army
St. Clare Health Mission
Great Rivers HUB
Wisconsin Department of Corrections
Medical College of Wisconsin
Wisconsin Department of Justice



Studying the lives lost due to drug overdose is one way to understand the impact of substance use in our community. This type of information will never capture the total impact, but we will continue to work towards increasing our knowledge and understanding of the opioid epidemic to lessen the impact it has on our community.