



## Panel Briefing: Key Trends & Data in Substance Use and Addiction

### Overdose Deaths Are Down, But Still Alarming High

- In 2024, the US experienced a significant decrease in drug overdose deaths, with provisional data indicating approximately 80,391 fatalities—a **26.9% decrease** from the estimated 110,037 deaths in 2023.<sup>1</sup>
- Experts attribute the recent decline to factors such as expanded access to naloxone, increased availability of treatment medications, and harm-reduction efforts as key drivers.<sup>2</sup>
- Despite this decline, overdose deaths remain substantially higher than pre-opioid epidemic levels. For context, the age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths increased from 8.2 per 100,000 population in 2002 to 32.6 in 2022.<sup>3</sup>
- **Changes in death classification and data collection methods may influence trend interpretation.** In 2022, the CDC shortened the reporting lag for overdose deaths from 6 months to 4 months due to improved timeliness—though differences were minimal (less than 0.2% nationally), policy shifts like this can affect how and when data are reported.<sup>4</sup>
- Policy and methodology changes may contribute to underreporting. As states update how they classify and submit overdose death data, inconsistencies across jurisdictions—and shifts in what qualifies as an opioid-related death—can artificially suppress or obscure true counts.

### Rising Substance Use and Addiction Despite Decrease in Overdose Deaths

- While overdose deaths are declining, the number of people using substances and developing SUDs is rising.
- In 2023, approximately **59.3 million** Americans aged 12 or older reported using illegal drugs or misusing prescription drugs within the past year. This represents a rise from 57.8 million individuals reported in 2022, 35.8 million in 2021, and 34.7 million in 2020.<sup>5</sup>
- According to the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) conducted by SAMHSA, approximately **48.5 million** people aged 12 or older had a substance use disorder in the past year. This includes 28.9 million with an alcohol use disorder and 27.2 million with a drug use disorder. Some individuals fall into both categories.<sup>6</sup>
- Young adults aged 18 to 25 had the highest prevalence of SUDs, with 27.1% (9.2 million individuals) affected in 2023.<sup>7</sup>
- Daily or near daily marijuana use has surpassed daily alcohol use in the US. In 2022, an estimated 17.7 million people reported using marijuana daily or near daily, compared to 14.7 million daily or near daily alcohol users. This is a significant increase from less than 1 million daily marijuana users in 1992.<sup>8</sup>
- Cannabis use among Americans aged 65 and older increased by nearly 46% from 2021 to 2023.<sup>9</sup>
- **TREATMENT GAPS:** despite the high prevalence of SUDs, treatment rates remain low. In 2023, only about 23.6% of people aged 12 or older who needed substance use treatment received it.<sup>10</sup>



### **A More Toxic and Unpredictable Drug Supply**

- Xylazine (“tranq”), a veterinary sedative, was involved in nearly 11% of overdoses across 20 states by 2022, up from 3% in 2019.<sup>11</sup>
  - Substances like xylazine and medetomidine are being detected in street drugs. These substances can cause severe health issues, and are not reversible with standard opioid overdose treatments like Narcan.<sup>12</sup>
- Fentanyl contamination across drug types – fentanyl is increasingly being mixed into various street drugs, increasing the risk of overdose.<sup>13</sup>
- Emergence of potent synthetic opioids such as nitazenes are surfacing in the drug market. These substances are often more potent than fentanyl and have been linked to a surge in overdose deaths.

### **Rise of Unregulated & Misleading Substances**

- Tianeptine (“gas station heroin”), often marked as a dietary supplement, is linked to coma, respiratory depression, and death. The FDA has labeled it a “dangerous and growing health trend,” especially among young people.<sup>14</sup>
- Kratom, a plant-derived substance with opioid-like effects, is legal but unregulated in much of the US and frequently misrepresented. It’s unregulated status in the US has led to widespread availability of products with inconsistent potency and purity.<sup>15</sup>
  - Some products marketed as “kratom extract” contain dangerously high levels of 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), a potent synthetic alkaloid. Recent lab testing in Texas and Colorado found mislabeled products with over 40% 7-OH purity. Any product exceeding 2% 7-OH is no longer considered kratom.<sup>16</sup>
- These unregulated products are often sold online and in smoke shops without quality control, safety labeling, or consumer education, contributing to widespread consumer misinformation and lack of safety oversight.<sup>17</sup>

### **Cannabis & Hallucinogen Use at Historic Highs**

- Cannabis and hallucinogen use are at record levels across all adult age groups:
  - 44% of adults ages 19-30 reported past-year cannabis use in 2023.<sup>18</sup>
  - 29% of adults ages 35-50 used cannabis in the past year, a historic high for this age group.<sup>19</sup>
  - Hallucinogen use has climbed steadily over the past five years, reaching 9% of adults ages 19–30 and 4% of adults ages 35–50 reporting past-year use in 2023. Reported substances included LSD, mescaline, peyote, psilocybin (“shrooms”), and PCP.<sup>20</sup>
- High potency THC products (dabs, oils, edibles) now reach up to 90% THC, compared to an average of ~4% THC in the 1990s, increasing risk for dependency and adverse health effects.<sup>21</sup>

### **Impact on Families**

- 1 in 4 US children (≈19 million) have a parent with a substance use disorder.<sup>22</sup>
- Over 6 million children live with a parent who has both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition.<sup>23</sup>



- Alcohol remains the leading cause of substance-related deaths in the US, outpacing opioids due to its long-term health toll.<sup>24</sup>
- Generational effects: children who grow up in households with substance misuse are more likely to encounter challenges in adulthood, including higher rates of divorce, unstable relationships, and difficulties in parenting, perpetuating a cycle of dysfunction.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CDC. *Drug Overdose Death Data*. National Center for Health Statistics.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

CDC. *Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts, 2024*.

[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2025/20250514.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2025/20250514.htm)

<sup>2</sup> New York Times. *Fact-Checking Trump's Address to Congress*. March 2025.

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/03/05/us/trump-speech-congress>

<sup>3</sup> CDC. *Drug Overdose Death Rates, 2002–2022*. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db491.htm>

<sup>4</sup> CDC. *Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts*. National Center for Health Statistics, Updated 2024.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

<sup>5</sup> DrugAbuseStatistics.org. *2023 U.S. Drug Use Data*. <https://drugabusestatistics.org>

<sup>6</sup> SAMHSA. *2023 NSDUH Companion Report*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt47096/2023-nsduh-companion-report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> AP News. *Daily Marijuana Use Outpaces Daily Alcohol Use in U.S.* <https://apnews.com/article/marijuana-cannabis-alcohol-use-disorder-daily-9cec33f3ac513123c8ffc8b8b3141877>

<sup>9</sup> Axios. *Seniors' Marijuana Use Rose Nearly 50% Since 2021*. <https://www.axios.com/2025/06/03/seniors-marijuana-use-increase>

<sup>10</sup> SAMHSA. *NSDUH 2023 Main Highlights*.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH%202023%20Annual%20Release/2023-nsduh-main-highlights.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> R Street Institute. *An Ever-Changing, Increasingly Toxic Drug Supply Makes Harm Reduction Essential*.

<https://www.rstreet.org/research/an-ever-changing-increasingly-toxic-drug-supply-makes-harm-reduction-essential>

<sup>12</sup> TIME. *What You Need to Know About Tranq*. <https://time.com/6164652/xylazine-overdose-crisis/>

<sup>13</sup> DEA. *Facts About Fentanyl*. <https://www.dea.gov/resources/facts-about-fentanyl>

<sup>14</sup> Medscape. *FDA Issues Warning on 'Gas Station Heroin' Tianeptine*. <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/fda-issues-warning-gas-station-heroin-tianeptine-2025a1000bhh>

<sup>15</sup> Medscape. *'Legal Morphine': The Rise of Kratom and 7-OH in the U.S.* <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/legal-morphine-rise-kratom-and-7-oh-us-2025a1000cco>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> NIDA. *Cannabis and Hallucinogen Use Among Adults Remained at Historic Highs in 2023*. <https://nida.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/2024/08/cannabis-and-hallucinogen-use-among-adults-remained-at-historic-highs-in-2023>

<sup>19</sup> CNN. *Cannabis, Hallucinogen Use Reaches Highs*. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/29/health/cannabis-hallucinogen-use-high-survey>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. (NIDA, Cannabis/Hallucinogen Use)

<sup>21</sup> NASW. *Cannabis: As Drug Becomes More Mainstream, Experts Sound the Alarm*.

<https://www.socialworkers.org/News/Social-Work-Advocates/2025-Winter-Issue/Cannabis-As-Drug-Becomes-More-Mainstream-Experts-Sound-the-Alarm-About-its-Dangers>

<sup>22</sup> NIH. *Millions of U.S. Kids Live with Parents with Substance Use Disorders*. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/millions-us-kids-live-parents-substance-use-disorders>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (AAETS). *Effects of Parental Substance Abuse on Children and Families*. <https://www.aaets.org/traumatic-stress-library/effects-of-parental-substance-abuse-on-children-and-families>