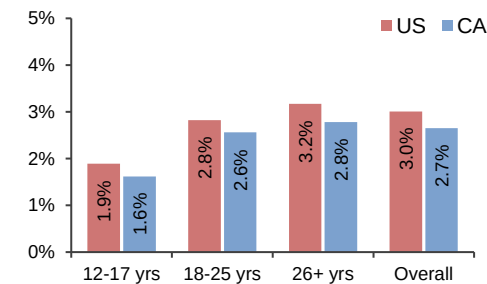


Prescription (Rx) Opioid Misuse/Abuse and Consequences

November 2025

Prevalence and Supply

Misuse/Abuse of Rx Opioids (pain medications) in the Past Year by Age (12+), 2022-2023¹



Misuse/abuse of Rx opioids is most common among people aged 26 years and older.

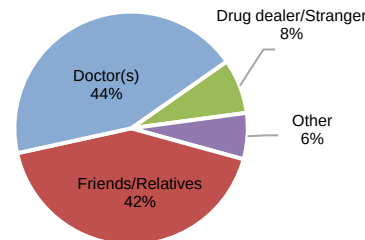
1 in 8 who used any Rx opioids in the past year misused them²

Counterfeit pills are widely available across all **50** states in the US³

5 in 10 counterfeit pills with fentanyl contains a lethal dose³



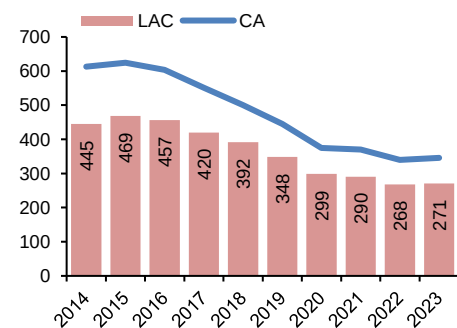
Source of Rx Opioids Among Past Year Misusers, 2024²



Most misusers obtained their Rx opioids from a friend/relative or doctors.

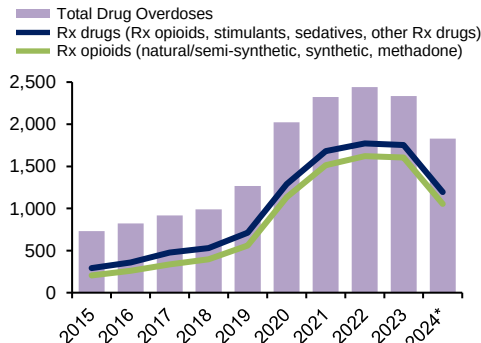
Prescriptions

Rate of opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies per 1,000 population, 2014-2023⁴



The rate of opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies has been declining over the past decade.

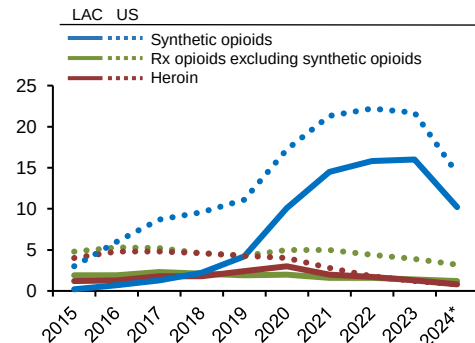
Drug Overdose Deaths in LAC, 2015-2024⁵



76% of drug overdose deaths involved Rx drugs, of which 88% involved Rx opioids.

Deaths

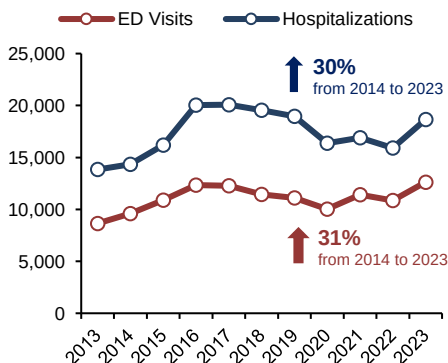
Opioid Death Rates^a by Opioid Type in the LAC and US, 2015-2024⁵



Rates of synthetic opioid (including fentanyl) overdose death increased starting in 2016, then fell in 2024.

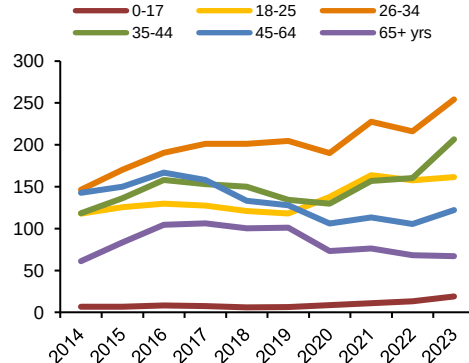
Healthcare Utilization

Opioid^b (excluding heroin) ED Visits and Hospitalizations in LAC, 2014-2023⁶



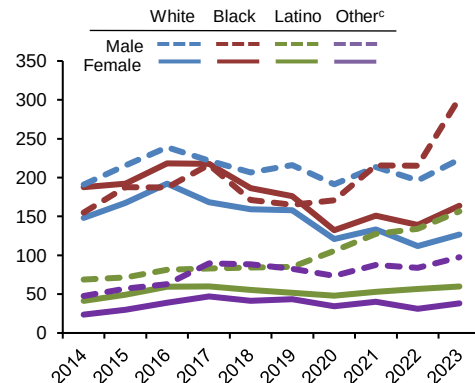
Opioid-related ED visits and hospitalizations are at higher levels compared to 10 years ago.

Opioid^b (excluding heroin) ED Visit Rates^a by Age Group in LAC, 2014-2023⁶



Adults aged 26-34 had the highest rates of opioid-related ED visit rates for all years from 2014-2023.

Opioid^b (excluding heroin) ED Visit Rates^a by Gender and Race/Ethnicity^c in LAC, 2014-2023⁶



White males had the highest opioid-related ED visits rates, but were surpassed by Black males in 2021.

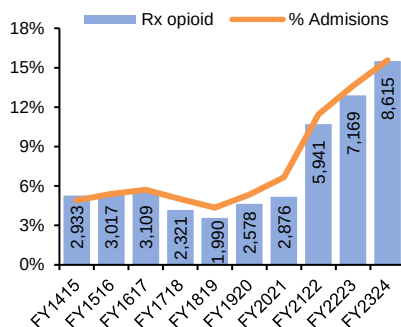
^a Per 100,000 population. ^b Records with any opioid-related (excluding heroin and abuse/dependence/use in remission) condition listed as a diagnosis or external cause of injury. ^c Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Other. ^d Per 100,000 population aged 12+. ^e Due to methodological changes in reporting race, use caution when comparing race/ethnicity rates from 2020 and onward with prior years. ^f Death data for 2024 is provisional and subject to change.

Prescription (Rx) Opioid Misuse/Abuse and Consequences

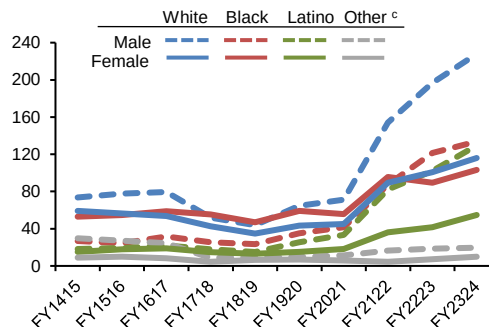
November 2025

Treatment Admissions

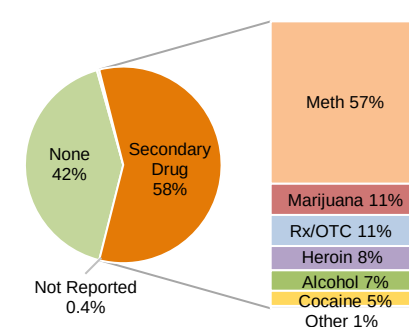
Primary Rx Opioid Admissions in LAC, FY1415-FY2324⁷



Rate^d of Primary Rx Opioid Admissions by Gender and Race/Eth. in LAC, FY1415-FY2324⁷



Secondary Drug Problem Among Primary Rx Opioid Admissions in LAC, FY2324⁷



Primary Rx opioid admissions sharply increased in FY2122 and continued to rise in the following years.

White males consistently had the highest rate of Rx opioid treatment admission since FY1920.

Meth was the most common secondary drug problem among primary Rx opioid admissions.

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health. 2022-2023 NSDUH State Estimates by Age Group

Prevalence

In 2022-2023, 3.0% of people aged 12 or older in the United States (US) and 2.7% in California (CA) misused/abused prescription (Rx) pain relievers (primarily opioids) in the past year.

Misuse/Abuse by Age

- In CA, misuse/abuse of Rx pain relievers in the past year was most common among people aged 26 years and older (2.8%), followed by young adults aged 18-25 (2.6%), and youth aged 12-17 (1.6%) in 2022-2023.
- CA had lower rates of Rx pain reliever misuse/abuse for all age groups compared to the national rates in 2022-2023.

- Misuse refers to use of Rx pain relievers without their own prescription or using at a higher dosage or more often than prescribed. Rx pain relievers include prescription forms of hydrocodone, oxycodone, tramadol, codeine, morphine, buprenorphine, oxycodone, hydromorphone, methadone, and fentanyl; it does not include illicitly manufactured forms of fentanyl from clandestine laboratories.

2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Prevalence

- In the US in 2024, 8.0 million (2.8%) people aged 12 or older misused/abused Rx pain relievers in the past year.
- Among those who took any Rx pain relievers in the past year, nearly 1 in 8 (12.0%) reported misusing them.

Source of Rx Pain Relievers at Last Misuse

- Most (43.7%) had obtained Rx pain relievers through prescription(s) from one (40.5%) or more than one doctor (2.0%), or stole from healthcare providers (1.3%); 42.3% were given by, bought from, or took from their friends or relatives; 8% bought from a drug dealer or other stranger; and 6% by other sources.

3. United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). 2025 National Drug Threat Assessment.

Counterfeit Pills

- Counterfeit pills have been found in all 50 states in the US. Counterfeit Rx opioids are easily accessible, including among youth, as many are sold on social media and e-commerce platforms.

Fentanyl

- In 2024, the DEA seized more than 61.1 million counterfeit pills, of which a majority were laced with fentanyl, the synthetic opioid driving the overdose death crisis in the US.

- Fentanyl is increasingly mixed with other drugs. In forensic lab investigations, fentanyl was identified in one in four reports of cocaine, and one in eight reports of methamphetamine.

- In 2024, 5 out of every 10 pills with fentanyl seized by the DEA contained at least 2 mg of fentanyl, which is a potentially lethal dose that is equivalent in size to a few grains of salt.

4. California Department of Public Health. Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System. California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard

- In 2023, there were 271 opioid prescriptions filled per 1,000 residents in LAC (12-month rolling rates). This is a dramatic decrease from the peak rate of 469 per 1,000 residents in 2015, when there were enough opioids prescribed to supply a bottle of opioids to over half of all adults in LAC.
- Although the rate of opioid prescriptions filled remains high, it has been declining every year over the past decade with the increased use of prescription drug monitoring programs and safer prescribing practices.

5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death. CDC WONDER Online Database.

- In 2024, Rx drugs were involved in about 65% of all drug overdose deaths. The majority (88%) of Rx drug overdose deaths involved Rx opioids.

Waves of Opioid Overdose Deaths in the US

- Increases in Rx opioids (natural/semi-synthetic and methadone) deaths associated with increased prescribing.
- Increases in heroin deaths associated with Rx opioid users who transitioned to heroin.
- Increases in synthetic opioid deaths associated with increases in illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF) found in heroin, counterfeit pills, cocaine, and other street drugs.

- In LAC, sharp increases in synthetic opioid overdose deaths began in 2016 and continued to increase through 2023 before falling in 2024, while rates of overdose death due to natural/semi-synthetic opioids and heroin decreased since 2020.
- Pharmaceutical and illicit fentanyl cannot be distinguished using existing ICD-10 coding. Synthetic opioids includes illicit fentanyl.

6. Department of Health Care Access and Information. Emergency Department and Inpatient Discharge Data Set. California Dept of Public Health.

- The number of emergency department (ED) visits with any opioid-related (excluding heroin) diagnosis or external cause of injury (i.e., abuse, dependence, use, or poisoning) was 31% higher in 2023 (n=12,627) than in 2014 (n=9,606).
- The number opioid-related (excluding heroin) hospitalizations was 30% higher in 2023 (n=18,644) than in 2014 (n=14,345).

ED Visits by Age Group

- Opioid-related (excluding heroin) ED visit rates (per 100,000 population) have been highest among adults aged 26-34 (rate=254), followed by those aged 35-44 (rate=207), aged 18-25 (rate=161), aged 45-64 (rate=122), aged 65+ (rate=67), and those aged 17 and under (rate=19).
- From 2020 to 2023, opioid-related (excluding heroin) ED visit rates increased 59% for those aged 35-44 years.

ED Visits by Gender-Race/Ethnicity

- White males consistently had the highest rate of opioid-related ED visits compared to all other gender-race/ethnicity groups in LAC from 2014 to 2020, but were surpassed by Black males in 2021.
- Opioid-related ED visits increased for all gender-race/ethnic groups from 2022 to 2023, particularly Black males (by 41%).

7. Los Angeles County Participant Reporting System and Substance Use Disorder Information System (Sage). Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

- The number of admissions to publicly funded substance use disorder treatment programs reporting Rx opioids as the primary drug problem increased from FY1415 to FY1617 then dropped in FY1718, possibly due to the launch of the new Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System and the Sage substance use disorder information system in 2017. The number of primary Rx opioid admissions increased again after FY1819, sharply increasing by 107% from FY2021 to FY2122 and then continued to increase in the following years. In FY2324, there were 8,615 primary Rx opioid treatment admissions, accounting for 15.6% of all treatment admissions.

Treatment Admissions by Gender-Race/Ethnicity

- Over the past 5 years, White males had the highest rate of Rx opioids treatment admissions per 100,000 population aged 12+ compared to all other gender-race/ethnic groups. In FY2324, the rate of Rx opioid treatment admissions among White males were nearly double that of Black (1.7 times) and Latino (1.8 times) males.
- Compared to other gender-race/ethnic groups, Latina females had the greatest increase (by 32%) in rate of admissions from FY2223 to FY2324.

Secondary Drug Problem

- In FY2324, 58% of admissions for a primary Rx opioid problem also reported having a secondary drug problem. Methamphetamine was the most common secondary drug problem, followed by marijuana, non-opioid Rx drugs or over-the-counter drugs, heroin, alcohol, cocaine, and other drugs.

Naloxone is an FDA approved medication that rapidly reverses opioid overdose. In LAC, naloxone can be obtained for free at [multiple locations](#) to people who may be at risk of an opioid overdose.

For treatment in LAC, call the Substance Abuse Service Helpline (SASH) at 844-804-7500, or use the web-based [Service & Bed Availability Tool](#). For more information on data or resources regarding prescription opioid and heroin abuse in LAC, see Safe Med LA's [data story](#) or visit [www.safemedla.org](#).

For more information on substance use disorders in LAC, visit <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc>.

For more information regarding this data brief, please contact Tina Kim, PhD at tkim@ph.lacounty.gov