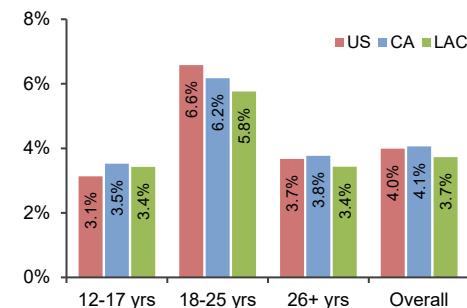


Prescription (Rx) Opioid Misuse/Abuse and Consequences

April 2024

Prevalence and Supply

Misuse/Abuse of Rx Opioids (pain medications) in the Past Year by Age, 2016-2018¹



Misuse/abuse of Rx opioids is most common among individuals aged 18-25 years.

Rx opioids are the **3rd** most abused drug²

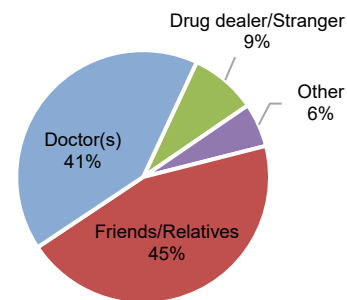
1 in 9 who used Rx opioids in the past year misused them²

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

7 in 10 counterfeit pills with fentanyl contains a lethal dose³



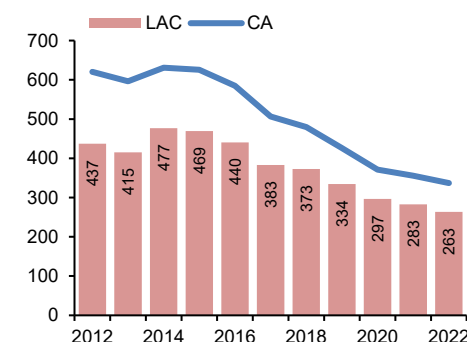
Source of Rx Opioids Among Past Year Misusers, 2022²



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

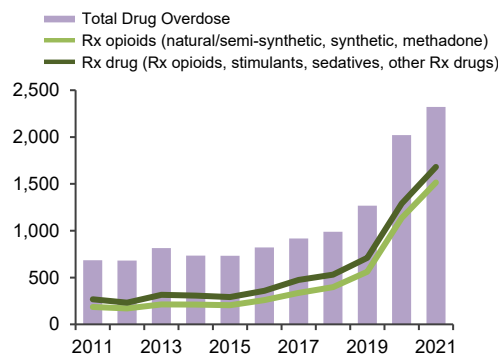
Prescriptions

Rate of opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies per 1,000 population, 2012-2022⁴



The rate of opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies has been declining since 2014.

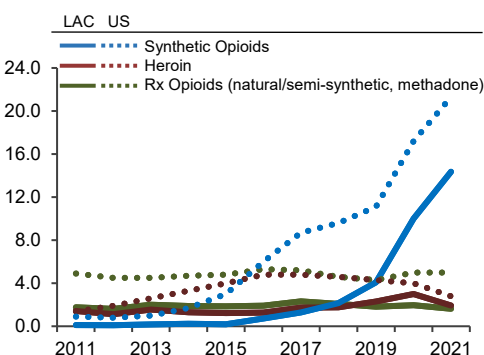
Drug Overdose Deaths in LAC, 2011-2021⁵



72% of drug overdose deaths involved Rx drugs, of which 90% involved Rx opioids.

Deaths

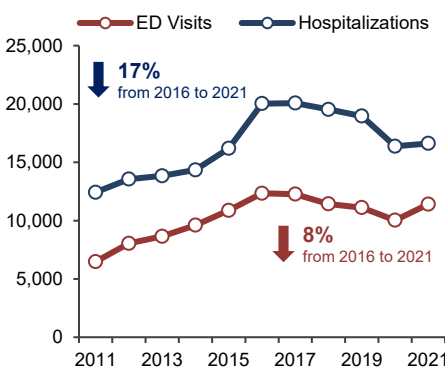
Opioid Death Rates^a by Opioid Type in the LAC and US, 2011-2021⁵



Synthetic opioid death rate increased starting in 2016, while rates for Rx opioids and heroin remained stable.

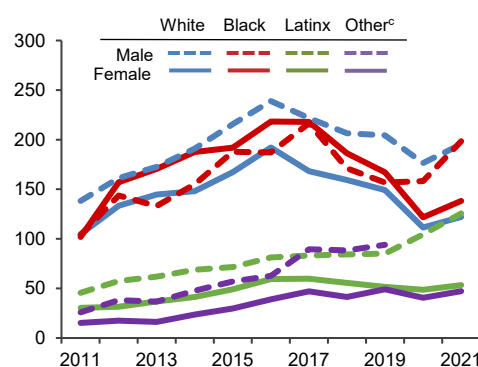
Healthcare Utilization

Opioid^b (excluding heroin) ED Visits and Hospitalizations in LAC, 2011-2021⁶



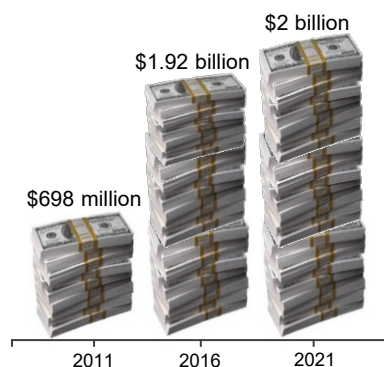
Opioid-related healthcare utilization increased up to 2016, then began to slightly decline.

Opioid^b (excluding heroin) ED Visit Rates^a by Gender and Race/Ethnicity^c in LAC, 2011-2021⁶



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

Total Annual Charges for Opioid^b (excluding heroin) Hospitalizations in LAC, 2011 and 2021⁶



The economic burden (2022 US dollars) of opioid misuse/abuse greatly increased over recent years.

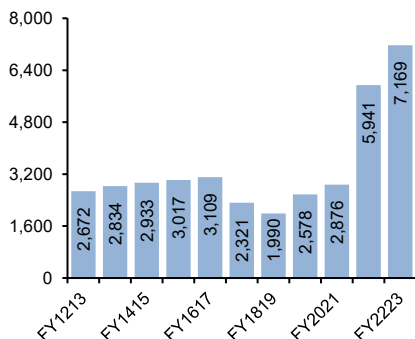
^a Per 100,000 population. ^b Records with any opioid-related (excluding heroin and abuse/dependence/use in remission) condition listed as a diagnosis or external cause of injury. ^c Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other. ^d Per 100,000 population aged 12+.

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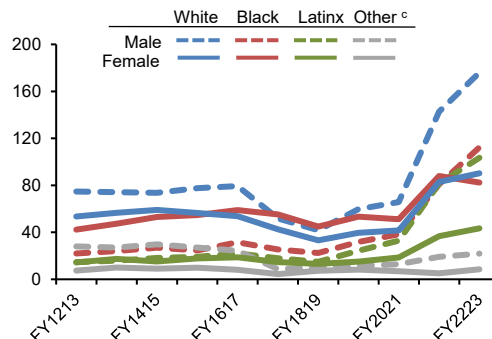
Treatment Admissions

Primary Rx Opioid Admissions in LAC, FY1213-FY2223⁷



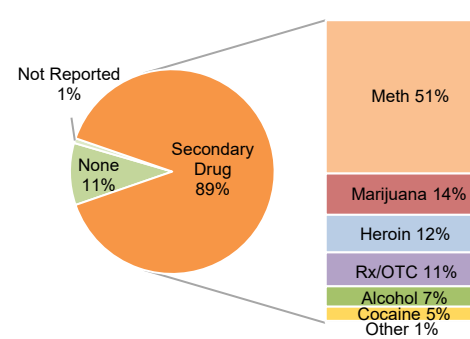
Treatment admissions for a primary Rx opioid problem sharply increased in FY2122 and continued to rise in the following year.

Rate^d of Primary Rx Opioid Admissions by Gender and Race/Eth. in LAC, FY1213-FY2223⁷



White males had the highest rate of Rx opioid treatment admissions. Rates for Black and Latinx males increased in FY2223, surpassing that of White and Black females.

Secondary Drug Problem Among Primary Rx Opioid Admissions in LAC, FY2223⁷



About 89% of primary Rx opioids admissions had a secondary drug problem in FY2223, with methamphetamine being the most common.

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health. 2016-2018 NSDUH Substate Region Estimates by Age Group

Prevalence

- In Los Angeles County (LAC) in 2016-2018, 3.7% of individuals aged 12 or older misused/abused prescription (Rx) pain relievers (primarily opioids) in the past year.

Misuse/Abuse by Age

- Misuse/abuse of Rx pain relievers in the past year was most common among individuals aged 18-25 years old at 5.8% in LAC.

- LAC had lower rates of Rx pain reliever misuse/abuse among youth compared to CA (3.4% vs 3.5%), and among young adults (5.8%) and adults (3.4%) compared to California (young adults 6.2%, adults 3.8%) and US (young adults 6.6%, adults 3.7%) in 2016-2018.

- Rx pain relievers included prescription forms of fentanyl, and 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 2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Prevalence

- In the US in 2022, 8.5 million (3%) individuals aged 12 or older misused/abused Rx pain relievers in the past year, making it the third most abused illicit drug, after marijuana and hallucinogens.

- Among those who took Rx pain relievers in the past year, 1 in 9 (11.5%) reported misusing them.

Source of Rx Pain Relievers at Last Misuse

- Most (45%) had obtained Rx pain relievers from their friends or relatives; 41% were prescribed Rx pain relievers from one (39%) or more than one (2%) doctor, or stole from health care providers (<1%); 9% bought from a drug dealer or other stranger; and 6% by other sources.

3. United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment and Counterfeit Pills Factsheet. 2023.

Counterfeit Pills

- Counterfeit pills have been found in all 50 states and have been dramatically increasing in the US.

- Counterfeit Rx opioids are easily accessible, including among youth, as many are sold on social media and e-commerce platforms.

Fentanyl

- The DEA seized more than 74 million fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills in 2023, the synthetic opioid that is the primary driver of drug overdose deaths in the US.

- From 2014 to 2019, the number of fentanyl reports

identified by forensic labs increased by 1,712% from 5,541 in 2014 to 100,378 in 2019.

- In 2023, 7 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 2012-2022, an average of 379 opioid prescriptions were filled per 1,000 residents in LAC each year.
- At the peak in 2014, there were enough opioids prescribed to supply a bottle of opioids to over half of all adults in LAC.
- Although rates remain high, opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies have been declining with the increased use of prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMP) 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 2021, Rx drugs were involved in about 72% of all drug overdose deaths.
- The majority (90%) 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 found in heroin, counterfeit pills, and cocaine.

- In LAC, sharp increases in synthetic opioid overdose deaths began in 2016 and continued to increase through 2021, while rates of overdose death due to natural/semi-synthetic opioids and heroin remained stable.
- Since pharmaceutical and illicit fentanyl cannot be distinguished using existing ICD-10 coding, totals for synthetic opioids may include illicit fentanyl.

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

- In LAC, both the number of hospitalizations and emergency department (ED) visits with any opioid-related (excluding heroin) diagnosis or external cause of injury (i.e., abuse, dependence, use, or poisoning) increased from 2011 to 2016, then began to slightly decline.
- Opioid-related hospitalizations dropped in 2020, possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while opioid-related ED visits remained relatively stable.

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 2011 to 2020 but were surpassed by Black males in 2021.
- Opioid-related ED visits increased for all gender-racial/ethnic groups in 2021.

Hospital Charges

- The average hospital charge per opioid-related (excluding heroin) hospitalizations more than doubled from \$56,226 in 2011 to \$120,513 in 2021.
- Annual hospital charges for opioid-related (excluding heroin) hospitalizations significantly increased by 187% from \$698 million in 2011 to \$2 billion in 2021 ($p_{trend} < 0.01$).
- Hospital charges for all hospitalizations with any opioid-related (excluding heroin) diagnosis or external cause of injury from 2011 to 2021 totaled to \$17 billion. All costs are adjusted for inflation to 2022 US dollars.

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 for individuals aged 12 or older to publicly funded treatment programs reporting Rx opioids as their primary drug problem at admission increased from FY1213 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 again increased following FY1819, and then sharply increased by 107% from FY2021 to FY2122 and continued to increase the following year.

Treatment Admissions by Gender-Race/Ethnicity

- From FY1920 to FY2223, White males had the highest rate of Rx opioids treatment admissions per 100,000 population aged 12 or older compared to all other gender-racial/ethnic groups. The rate of admissions among Black and Latinx males greatly increased from FY2122 to FY2223 by 39% and 27%, respectively, and surpassed that of White and Black females in FY2223.

Secondary Drug Problem

- In FY2223, 89% 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, heroin, other non-opioid Rx drugs or over-the-counter, 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.