

Fatal Overdose Victims & The Criminal Justice System

2021



OFFICE *of the* DISTRICT
ATTORNEY GENERAL
6th Judicial District • Charne P. Allen

Message from District Attorney General Charme Allen



My office uses this data to identify possible intervention points to fight against substance misuse in our community from all angles.

- DAG Charme Allen

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we quickly began to see a turn for the worse in the number of lives lost to overdose deaths. As outlined in last year's report, our community did see the number drop in recent years; however, we were not prepared for the impact of a global pandemic.

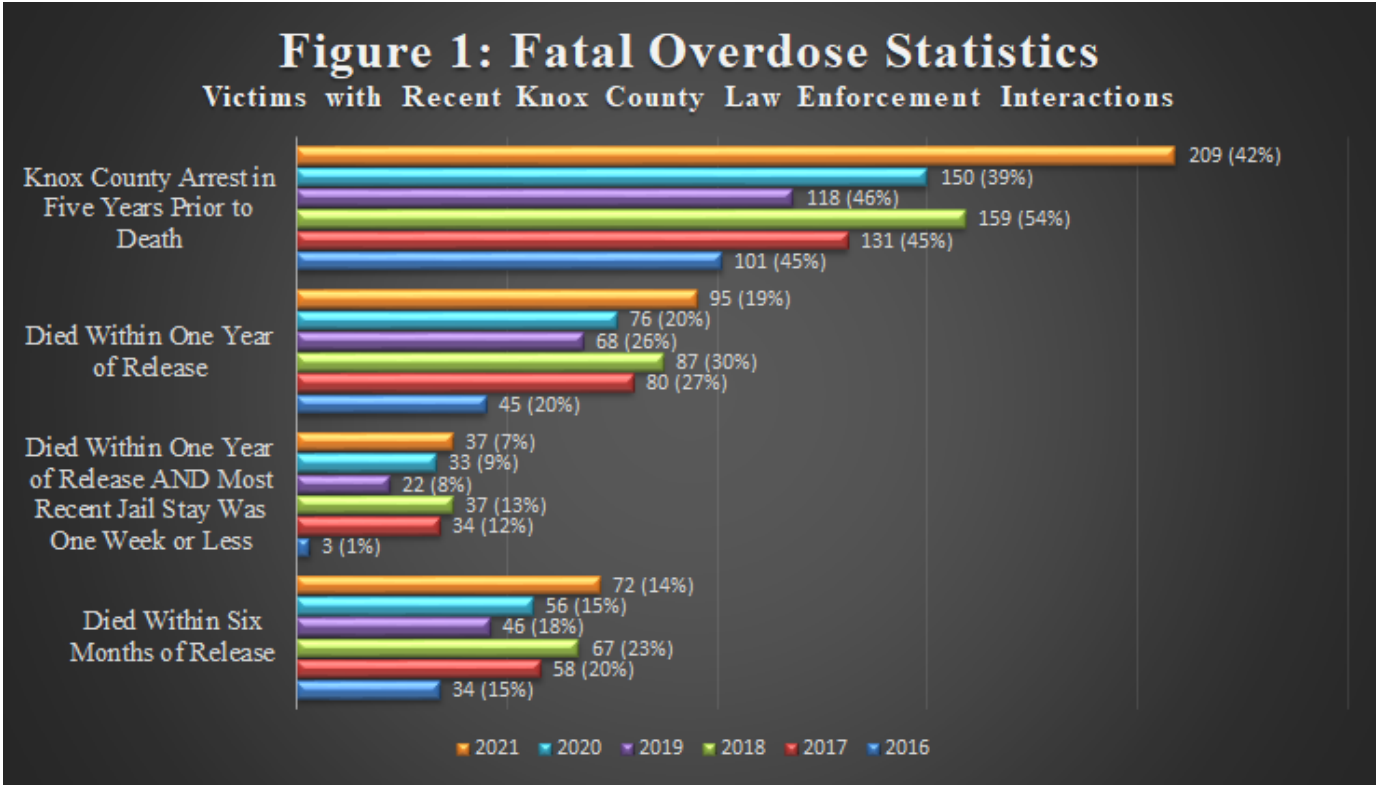
As the number of lives lost increased, we continued to add tools to our toolbelt to fight overdose. We know working together as a community works. We have also continued to partner with community agencies to gather and analyze data to implement effective prevention and intervention initiatives for individuals facing addiction to increase community safety and reduce overdose deaths.

One notable advancement is the creation of the Overdose Fatality Review Team. The OFRT is a multidisciplinary team that reviews overdose deaths to effectively identify system gaps and innovative, community-specific overdose prevention and intervention strategies. The OFRT uses data collected by the Drug Related Death Task Force and Knox County District Attorney General's Office.

The charge of the District Attorney General's Office is to pursue the guilty and protect the innocent. Our concerted effort to reduce the number of drug overdoses and stop traffickers from supplying dangerous drugs in our community helps accomplish this two-tiered mission. The 2021 Fatal Overdose Victims & The Criminal Justice System Report continues my effort to provide data which outlines the interaction between the criminal justice system and individuals who passed away due to a drug overdose. My office uses this data to identify possible intervention points to fight against substance misuse in our community from all angles. I hope Knox County leadership and service agencies will continue to use this report in the fight to eradicate drug misuse and overdose in our community.



Charme P. Allen
District Attorney General
6th Judicial District



In 2021, 533 people died in Knox County due to a drug overdose. The number of overdoses countywide increased by 29% from 2020 to 2021. The Knox County Regional Forensic Center’s most recent Drug Related Death Report indicates that the top four drugs found through autopsies in Knox County include (1) Fentanyl & Analogues, (2) Methamphetamine, (3) Diphenhydramine, and (4) Alcohol/Ethanol. For the full report, visit the Knox County Regional Forensic Center’s website.

The total number of fatal overdose cases reviewed by the District Attorney General’s Office and the Drug Related Death Task Force in 2021 was 498, resulting in a 30% increase in the number of cases reviewed. This number excludes fatal overdose cases if the cause of death was alcohol intoxication or suicide or if the incident originated from outside of Knox County.

Figure 1 details contact between local law enforcement and individuals who fatally overdosed in Knox County. In 2021, 209 individuals who overdosed had a Knox County arrest 5 years prior to their death. The opportunity for community partnership within the criminal justice system still exists as 42% were arrested within five years prior to their death. Additionally, 19% of those who died were released from jail sometime in the year before their death, and 14% died within six months of release.

Identifying and employing intervention points in the criminal justice system is a proven method to reduce recidivism rates and increase recovery rates for individuals with substance use disorders.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 provide a demographic breakdown of the individuals who fatally overdosed and had a Knox County arrest record in the five years prior to their death, which totaled 209 individuals. This information can assist the community in its effort to develop additional community resources and partnerships within the criminal justice system. Data sharing and collaborative partnerships have proven paramount to our community's ability to prevent overdose deaths. To find the Knox County District Attorney General's Office previous reports, visit <https://dag.knoxcountyttn.gov/>.

Figure 2: Fatal Overdoses by Gender
Victims with Knox County Arrests in Last Five Years

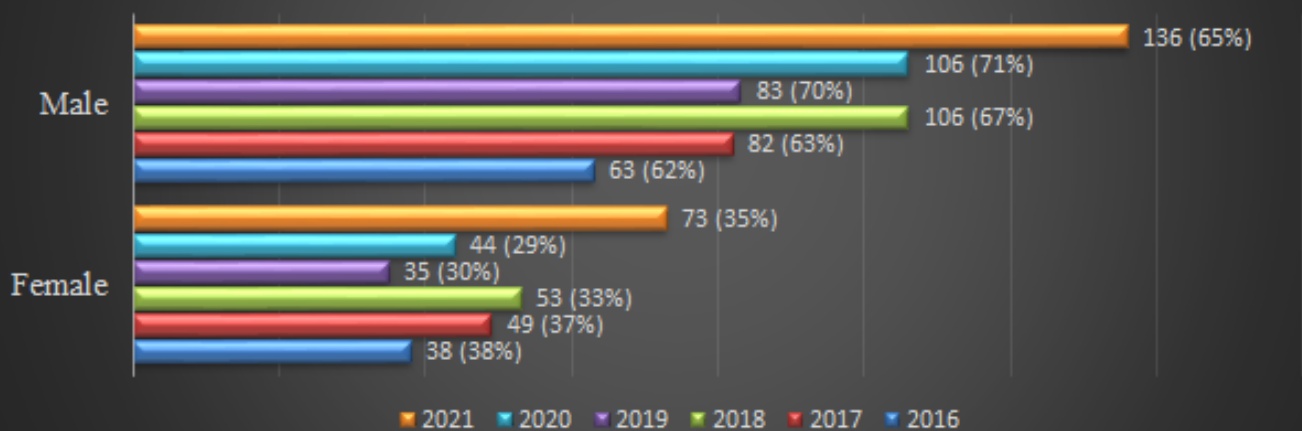


Figure 3: Fatal Overdoses by Race
Victims with Knox County Arrests in Last Five Years

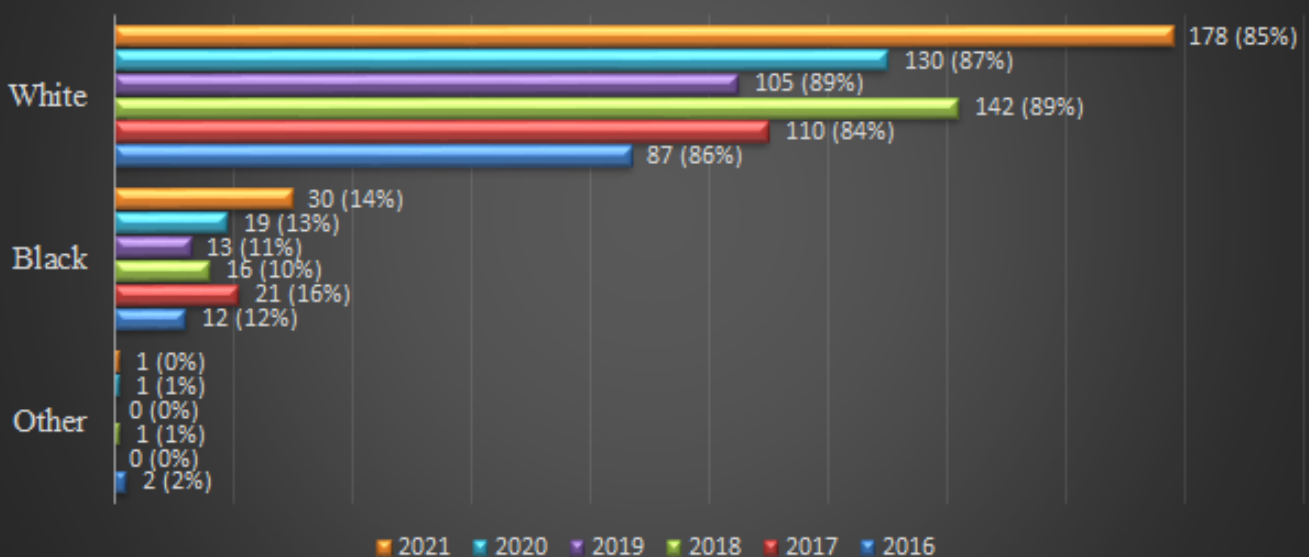
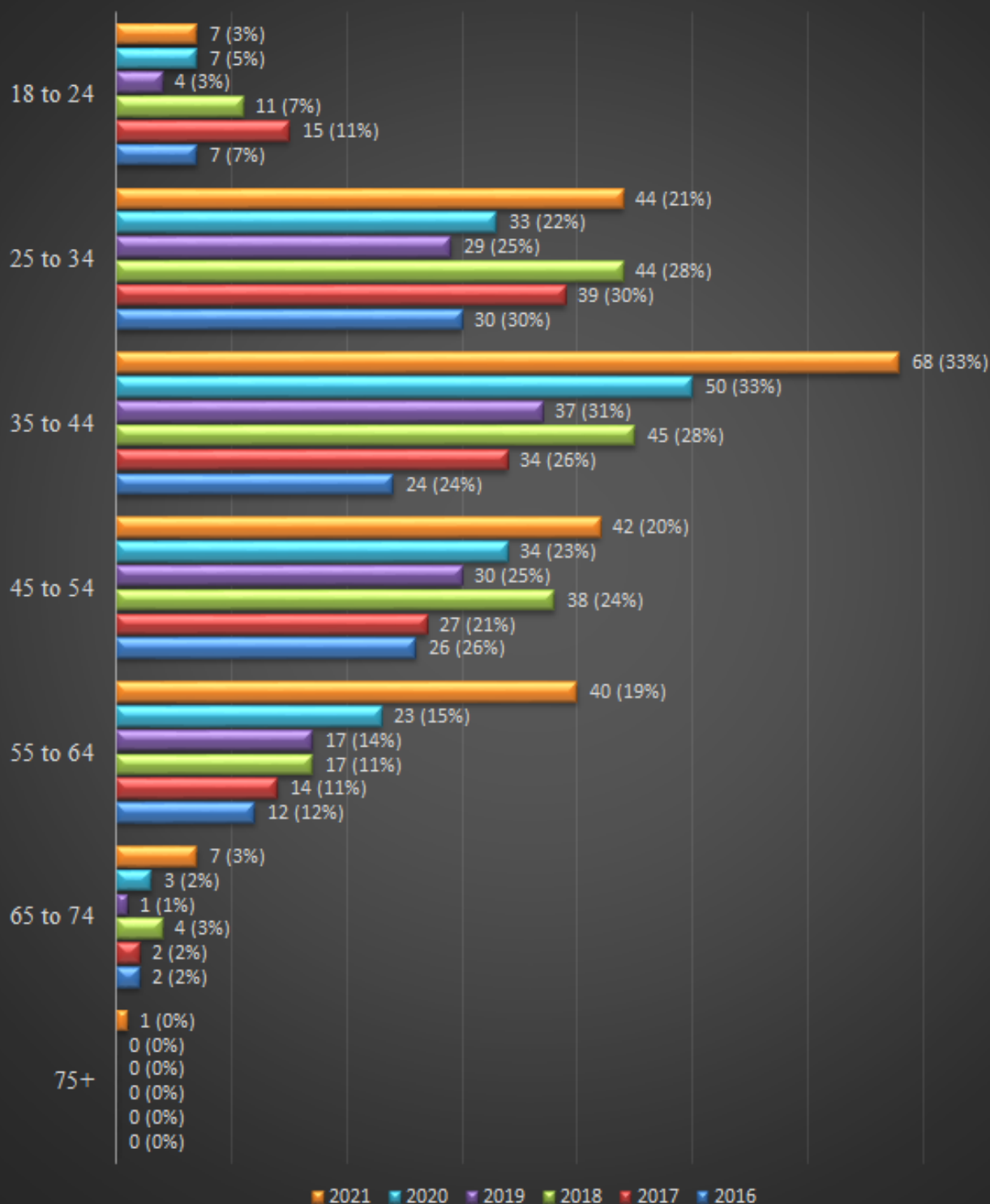


Figure 4: Fatal Overdoses by Age
Victims with Knox County Arrests in Last Five Years



Note: Sum of components may not equal 100% because of independent rounding.

Prevention & Intervention Initiatives

Through community partnership, the District Attorney General's Office has introduced innovative prevention initiatives and jail-based and community-based treatment opportunities in Knox County, TN.



Drug Related Death Task Force

To address the rising number of drug-related deaths in Knox County, District Attorney General Charme Allen helped spearhead the Drug Related Death Task Force in 2017 with Appalachia HIDTA, Knox County Regional Forensic Center, Knox County Sheriff's Office, Knoxville Police Department, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, and United States Drug Enforcement Administration. The task force has since grown to include other East Tennessee agencies. The task force initiated a concerted effort for law enforcement and other community agencies to treat overdose deaths as criminal investigations. This partnership not only strengthened law enforcement's ability to stop dangerous drug traffickers from operating in our community but also created new avenues to gather, share, and analyze data.



All4Knox & Overdose Fatality Review Team

All4Knox, a joint City of Knoxville and Knox County initiative, created and is implementing a communitywide strategic plan to reduce substance misuse and its impact on individuals, families, and our community. District Attorney General Allen co-chaired the Justice Sector committee and is currently implementing aspects of the plan. In 2021, the Overdose Fatality Review Team was created as part of the ALL4Knox Strategic Plan to reduce substance misuse in Knox County. The OFRT is a multidisciplinary team that reviews overdose deaths to effectively identify system gaps and innovative, community-specific overdose prevention and intervention strategies. The OFRT uses data collected by the Drug Related Death Task Force and Knox County District Attorney General's Office.



Drug Overdose Support Group

The Knox County District Attorney General's Office and Knoxville Police Department host monthly support group meetings for parents, children, siblings, or other family members who have lost a loved one due to the drug overdose epidemic. The group also hosts several events throughout the year to raise awareness about the dangers of substance misuse to prevent others from experiencing the devastation of overdose deaths. For more information, visit <https://dag.knoxcountyttn.gov/>.



Medication Assisted Treatment Program

In 2017, the District Attorney General's Office, McNabb Center, and Knox County Sheriff's Office started a pilot program referred to as "A Shot at Life." The program embedded medication assisted treatment into the Knox County criminal justice system to reduce recidivism and relapse rates for non-violent offenders with opioid use disorders. The goal of the program was to demonstrate the community benefit of providing appropriate levels of substance abuse treatment in lieu of incarceration for non-violent offenders. The program demonstrated positive results; however, the program also demonstrated that individuals need long-term care and supportive relationships to maintain sobriety. These findings revealed a need for additional community support for individuals in recovery.



Community Education

In addition to this report and messaging on social media, the Knox County District Attorney's Speakers Bureau matches members of the office with community groups, organizations, and businesses who want to learn more about various aspects of the criminal justice system. One of the most requested topics the office is asked to speak to are the various ways the office is working to combat drug trafficking and the deadly flow of drugs into our community.



OFFICE *of the* DISTRICT
ATTORNEY GENERAL
6th Judicial District • Charmé P. Allen