



2022

Fatal Overdose Victims & The Criminal Justice System



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



Message from District Attorney General Charme Allen

In 2022, the District Attorney General's Office continued its mission to pursue the guilty and protect the innocent. As your District Attorney, I've also worked to keep my promise to be "Tough on Crime and Smart of Prevention." This mission and my promise are put on full display in our fight to stop the rising number of overdose deaths in our community. After 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced a devastating 29% increase in overdose deaths. Fortunately in 2022, the increase was much less severe at 2%. Unfortunately, 544 individuals still lost their lives to a drug overdose. The Knox County District Attorney's Office will continue attacking Knox County's drug problem from all angles, including prosecution and the use of prevention and treatment measures.

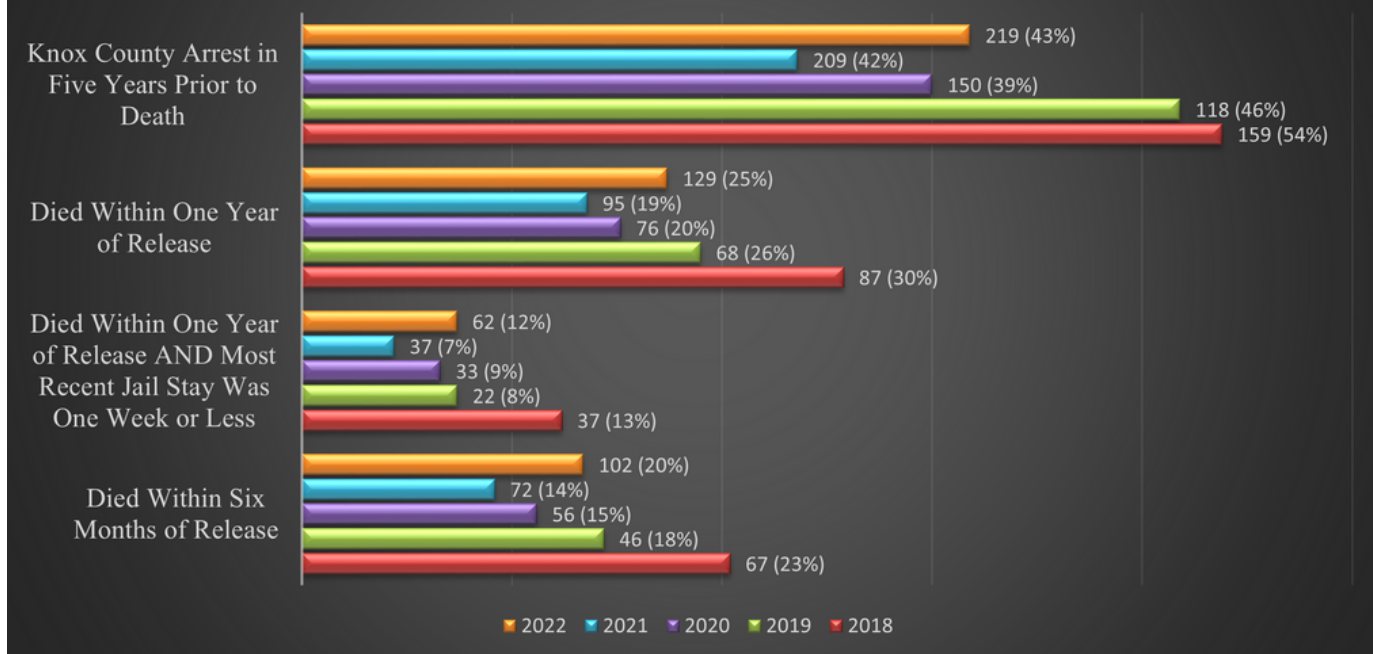
From a law enforcement and prosecution angle, the DA's Office recently locked arms with other district attorneys and law enforcement agencies in East Tennessee to stop the flow of drugs coming into our community through Detroit-based drug dealers. This effort is called the 313 Initiative. I want everyone to know that Knoxville and surrounding counties are a hostile market for would-be drug traffickers.

Data collected from across our community can help us keep our eyes on the horizon for new threats and create plans to eradicate unnecessary loss and preserve public safety. The data presented in the 2022 Fatal Overdose Death Victims & the Criminal Justice System Report continues to highlight opportunities for prevention and intervention. The criminal justice system is just one piece of the puzzle. I hope this data helps inform our community-based approach for communitywide success.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charme P. Allen".

Charme P. Allen
District Attorney General
6th Judicial District

Figure 1: Fatal Overdose Statistics
Victims with Recent Knox County Law Enforcement Interactions



In 2022, 544 people died in Knox County due to a drug overdose. The Knox County Regional Forensic Center’s 2022 Drug Related Death Report indicates that the top five drugs found through autopsies in Anderson and Knox counties are synthetic opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine, alcohol/ethanol, and xylazine. 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 2022 was 510, resulting in a 2% 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 2022, 219 individuals who overdosed had a Knox County arrest within the 5 years prior to their death. The opportunity for community partnership within the criminal justice system remains as 43% were arrested within 5 years prior to their death. Additionally, 25% of those who died were released from jail sometime in the year before their death, and 20% 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 219 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 dag.knoxcountyttn.gov.

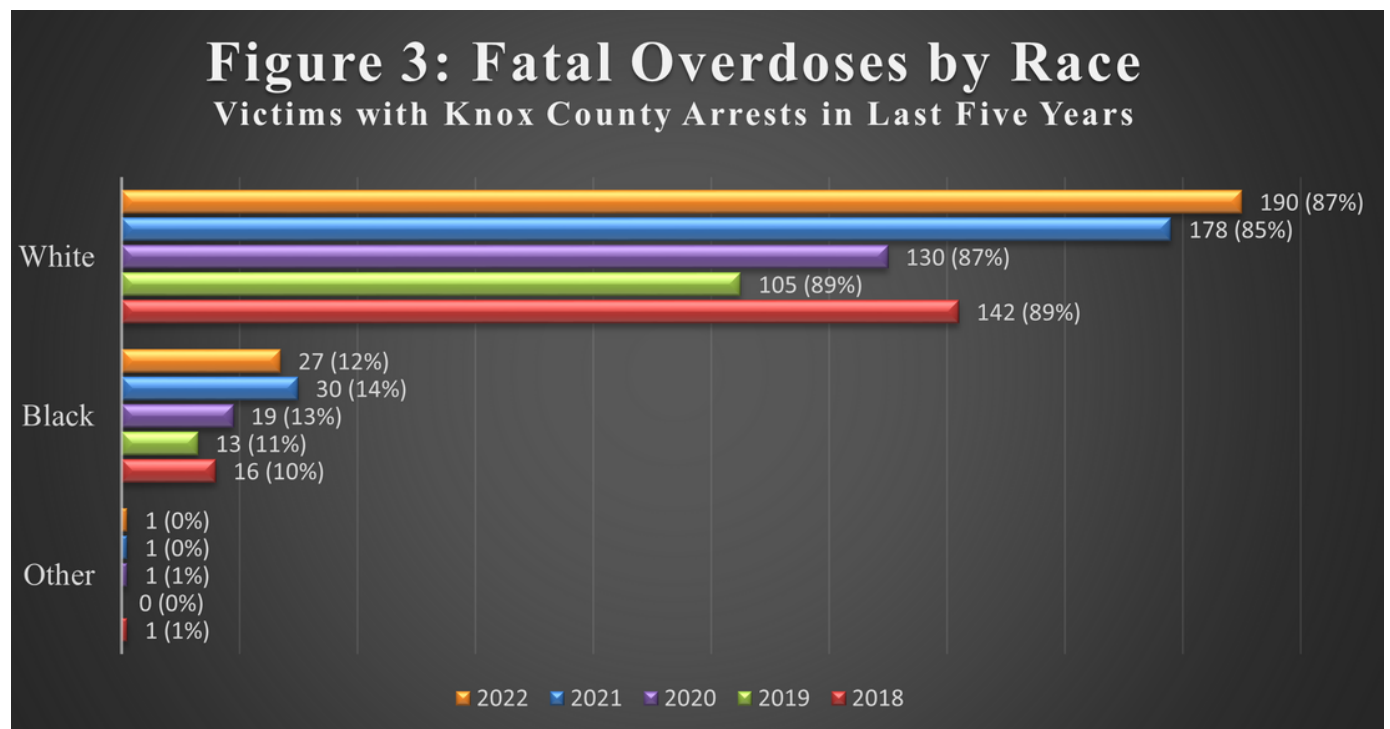
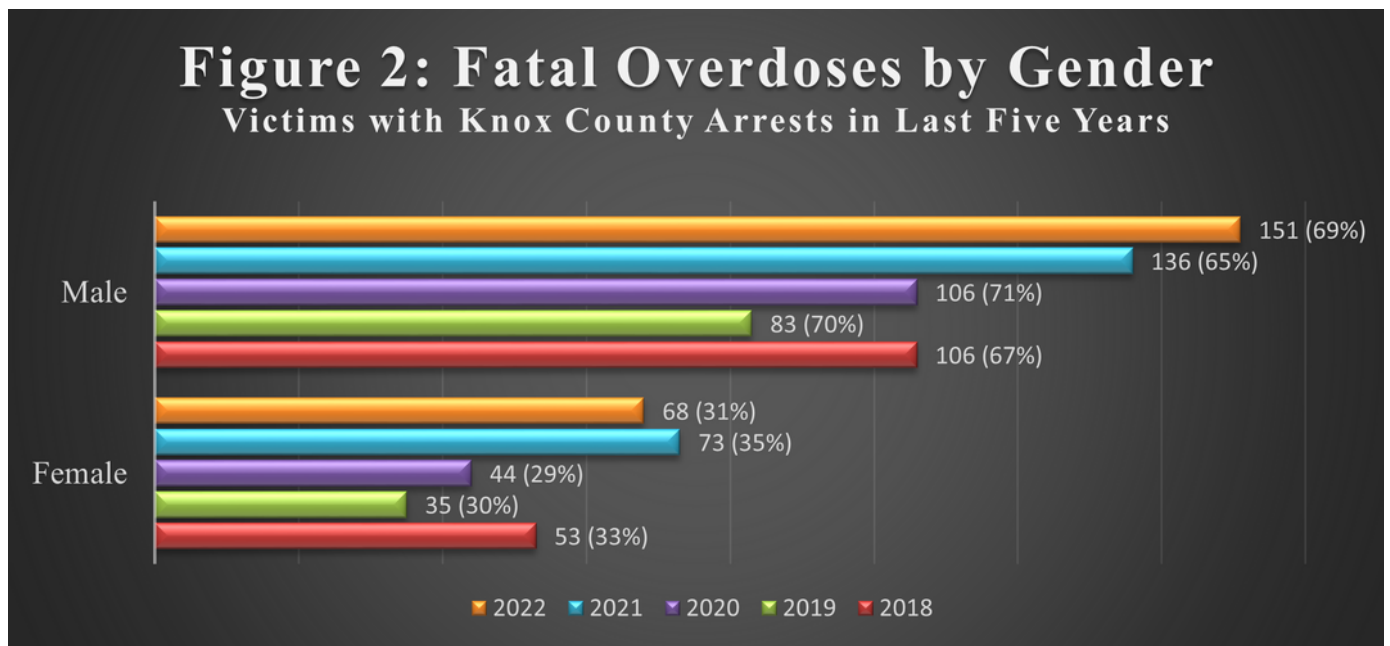
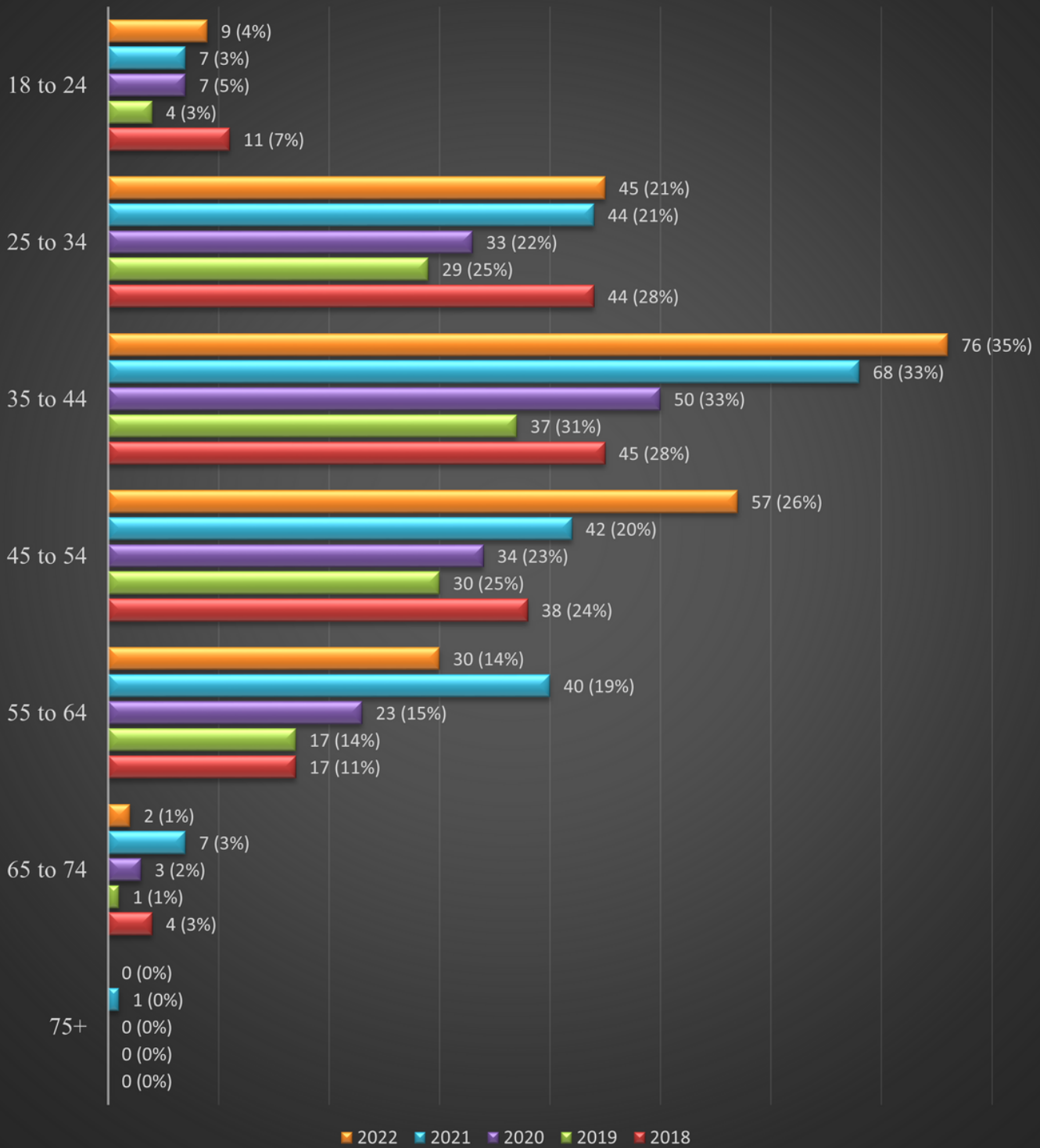


Figure 4: Fatal Overdoses by Age

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.

313 Initiative

The 313 Initiative is a concerted and organized effort by numerous state and local law enforcement agencies to identify, target, and dismantle individuals and groups from the Detroit, Michigan, area who have chosen Knox and surrounding counties to distribute prolific amounts of narcotics, which have led to increased numbers of associated violent crimes and overdose deaths. Law enforcement agencies will utilize all available resources and investigative tools to identify these individuals and groups from Detroit and will use both traditional detective work and 21st-century technology to stop the pipeline of illegal drugs into our community.

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 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.



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