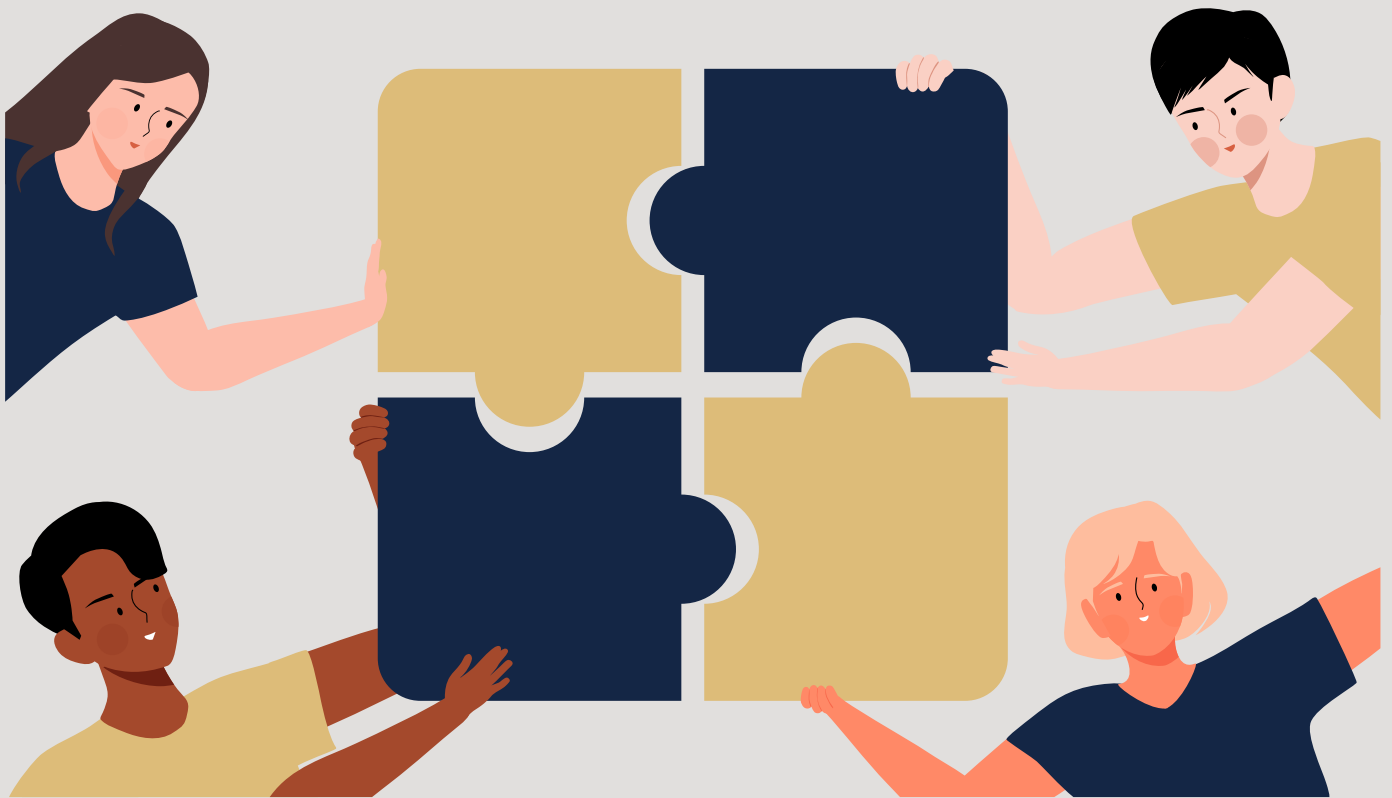


# Fatal Overdose Victims & The Criminal Justice System

2020



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

# Message from District Attorney General Charme Allen



*"It is our mission to remove the flow of deadly drugs from our community and to hold offenders accountable. At the same time, it is my hope to eradicate overdose deaths in our community."*

- DAG Charme Allen

The most successful strategy to fight the opioid epidemic has always been community collaboration.

With collaborations like the Drug Related Death Task Force and All4Knox, the number of overdose deaths plateaued and then eventually began to decline in recent years. Unfortunately, our community plans did not account for a global pandemic, which came with a devastating impact to our community's health and social wellbeing.

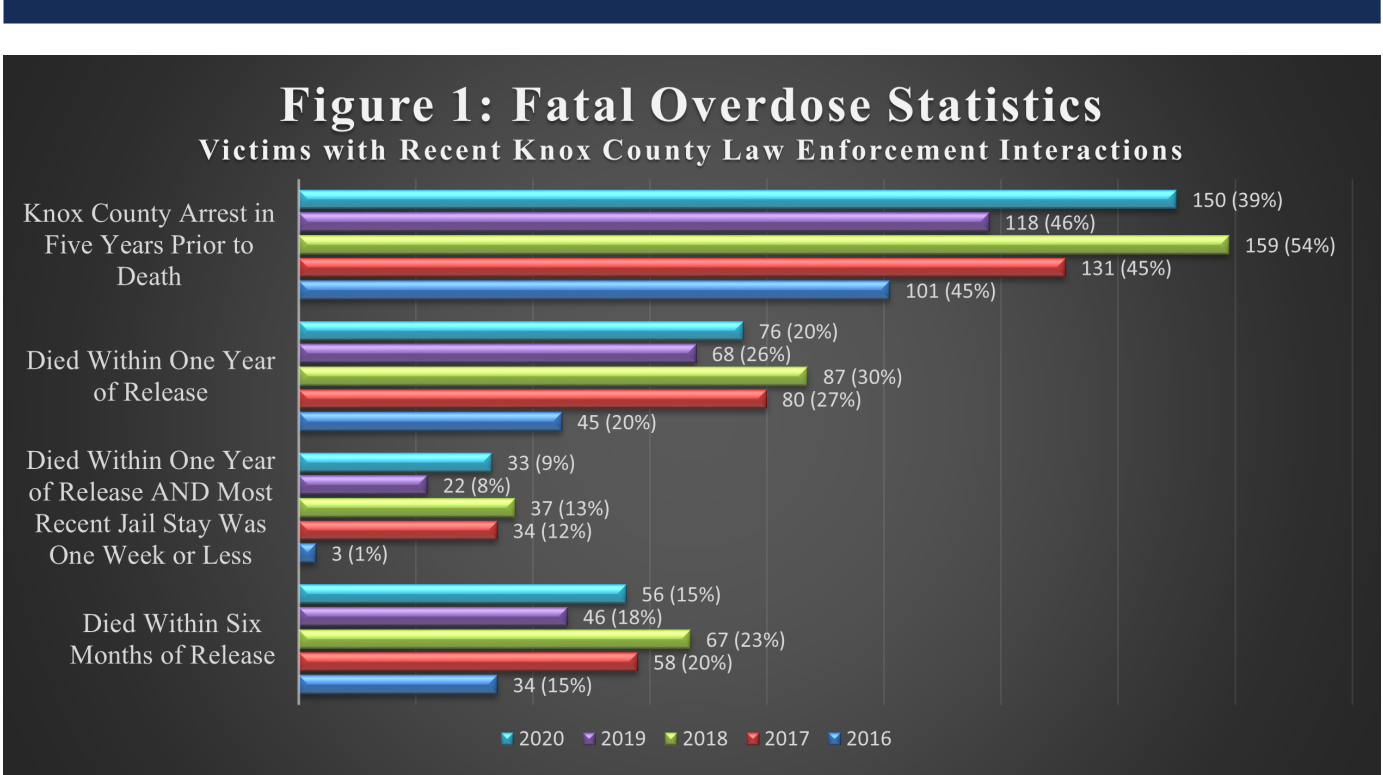
The Knox County District Attorney General's Office will continue to combat the threat of fentanyl and other deadly drugs through the targeted prosecution of drug traffickers in our community.

We will also continue to partner with other community agencies to gather and analyze data in order to introduce effective prevention and intervention initiatives for individuals facing addiction to increase community safety and reduce overdose deaths.

The 2020 Fatal Overdose Victims & The Criminal Justice System Report provides 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. For the past several years, community agencies have used the data in this report to do the same thing.

It is my mission to remove the flow of deadly drugs from our community and to hold offenders accountable. At the same time, it is my hope to eradicate overdose deaths in our community. Thank you for your interest and investment in the lives of Knox County citizens. Together, we can make our county a safer place to live, work, and play!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Charme Allen".



In 2020, 413 people died in Knox County due to a drug overdose. The number of overdoses countywide increased by 41% from 2019 to 2020. 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) Heroin, and (4) Cocaine. 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 2020 was 383. 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. Unfortunately, this year the community saw the highest increase of overdose death cases reviewed by the task force from the previous year, 47%.

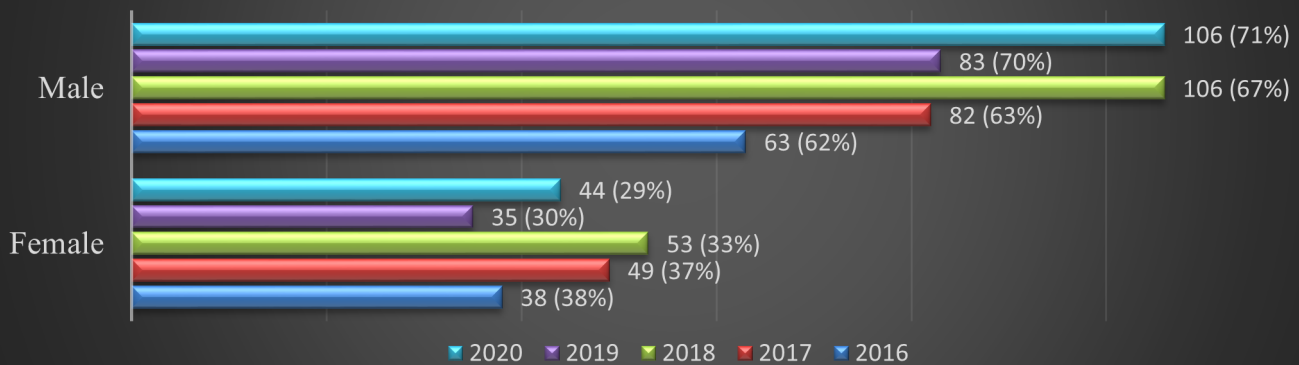
Figure 1 details contact between local law enforcement and individuals who fatally overdosed in Knox County. In 2020, 150 individuals who overdosed had a Knox County arrest 5 years prior to their death. The percentage of people who fatally overdosed and had recent interactions with law enforcement decreased by 7%; however, an opportunity for community partnership still exists as 39% were arrested within five years prior to their death.

Additionally, 20% of those who died were released from jail sometime in the year before their death, and 15% died within six months of release.

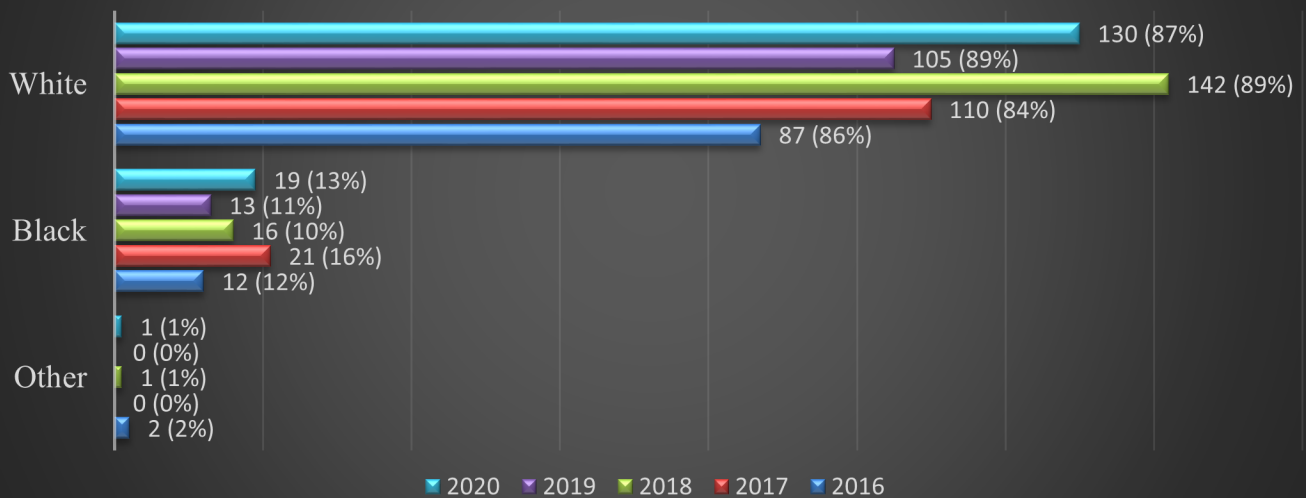
Intervening through or within the criminal justice system is a proven, cost-effective method of reducing recidivism rates and increasing recovery rates for individuals with substance use disorders and can, ultimately, save lives.

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 150 individuals. The distribution is fairly consistent with the breakdown for all fatal overdose deaths in Knox County. However, this information could be helpful in the community's effort to develop additional community resources and partnerships with 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 [knoxcounty.org/dag](http://knoxcounty.org/dag).

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

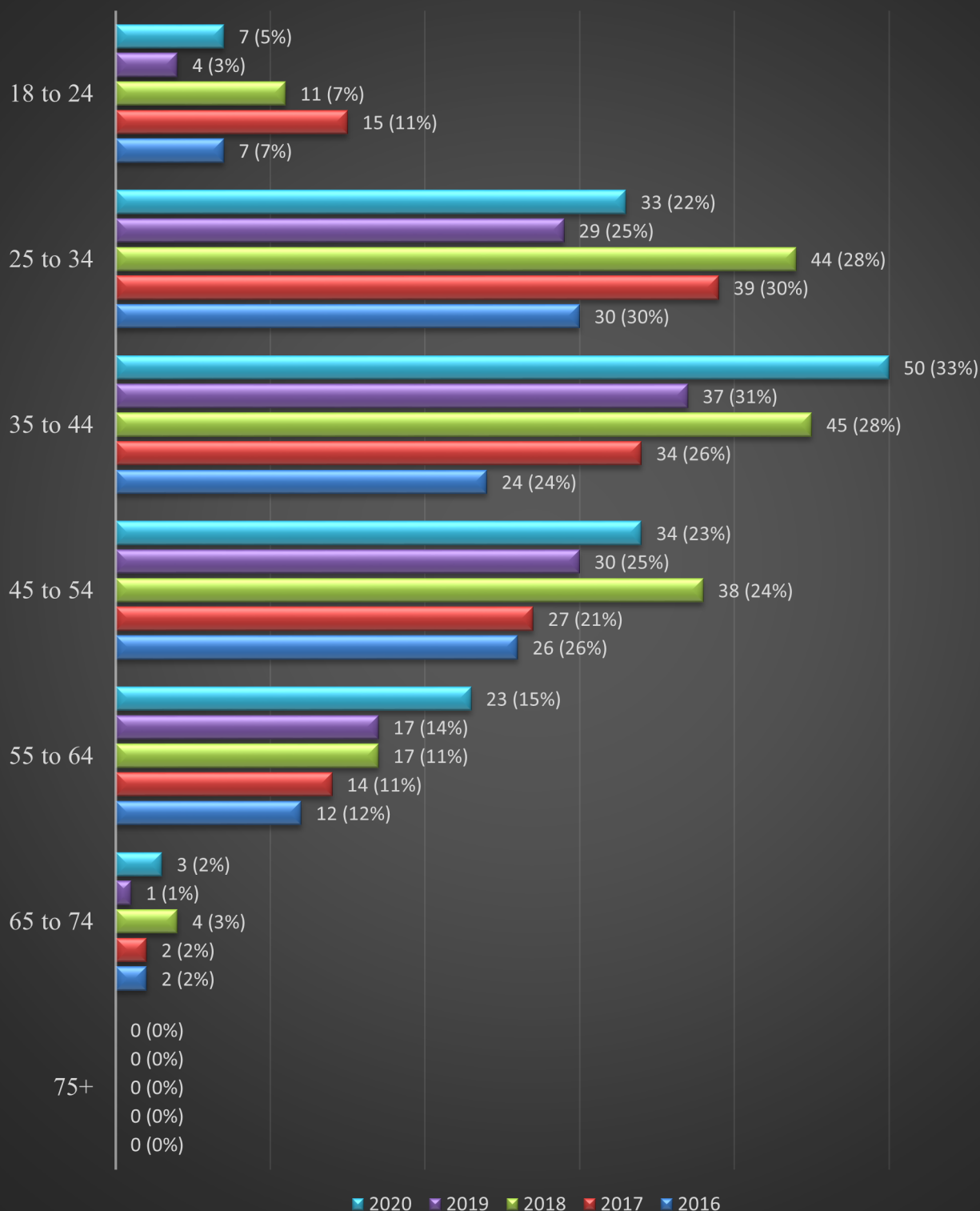


**Figure 3: Fatal Overdoses by Race**  
Victims with Knox County Arrests in Last Five Years



# 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 and Intervention Initiatives

The Knox County District Attorney General's Office has introduced innovative prevention initiatives and jail-based and community-based treatment opportunities. The information presented in this report will be used by this office and community partners to continue to reduce the impact of substance misuse in our community. Together, we can reduce crime and victimization, and we can reclaim lives not yet lost to the drug epidemic.



## Drug Related Death Task Force

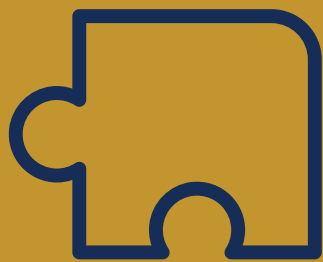
To address the rising number of drug-related deaths in Knox County, District Attorney General Charme Allen helped spearhead the Drug Related Death Task Force in 2017 with Appalachia HIDTA, Knox County Regional Forensic Center, Knox County Sheriff's Office, Knoxville Police Department, Tennessee Bureau 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

The goal of All4Knox, a joint City of Knoxville and Knox County initiative, is to create and implement 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 with KPD Chief Eve Thomas, and DEA Resident Agent in Charge Tom Bevins. Individual sector strategies were created between 2019 and 2020. Visit [all4knox.org](http://all4knox.org) to learn more.

# Prevention and Intervention Initiatives Continued



## 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 [knoxcounty.org/dag](https://knoxcounty.org/dag).



## 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 reveal 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. The topic the office is asked to speak on the most is the ways the office is working to combat drug trafficking and the deadly flow of drugs into our community.





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