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Overdose deaths have dramatically increased across the United States over the past two decades.¹ These increases have been especially pronounced since 2020, with a nearly 15 percent increase in overdose deaths from 2020 to 2021 (almost 107,000 lives lost in 2021 alone).²

Changes in Oregon's overdose death rate track with national trends. However, Oregon's overdose death rate has consistently remained below the national average (See Figure 1).³ In 2021, Oregon's age-adjusted overdose death rate ranked 17th among the states (See Figure 2).⁴

Oregon's overdose death rate is comparable to other western states (see Figure 2), with Oregon and nearly all of the West and the country as a whole seeing increased overdose deaths from 2020 to 2021.⁵ Provisional data suggest that 2022 overdose deaths leveled off or even decreased both nationally and in Oregon, although numbers remain high.⁶

Drug overdose is a public health issue that impacts us all. An unpredictable drug supply permeated with synthetic opioids, like fentanyl, is a primary driver of overdose deaths.

Synthetic opioids were involved in two-thirds of overdose deaths across the country in 2021.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdowns, which increased isolation and disrupted access to health services, further exacerbated fatal overdoses.⁸ Like national trends, COVID-19 likely led to increased overdose death rates in Oregon.⁹

Fentanyl has also increasingly overtaken the drug supply in Oregon and the entire western part of the U.S.¹⁰ As a result, overdose deaths involving fentanyl have dramatically increased in Oregon. This is similar to previous patterns seen in the eastern U.S.¹¹

OR's overdose death rate remains lower than most states, but even one overdose death is too many.

There is no evidence to suggest decriminalization of possession of small amounts of drugs under Measure 110 has impacted overdose death rates in Oregon. However, eliminating criminal penalties for drug possession removes fear of arrest, a significant barrier to seeking treatment and other supportive services.

Because of Measure 110, hundreds of millions of dollars were recently allocated to expand services. This funding has allowed providers across Oregon to expand services intended to reduce overdose risk. Despite this progress, more policy changes and resources are needed to reduce overdose deaths. This includes authorizing and funding overdose prevention centers and drug checking services.

¹ Merianne R. Spencer, Arialdi M. Miniño & Margaret Warner, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, "Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States, 2001-2021," *NCHS Data Brief* 457, Dec. (2022), www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db457.htm.

² *Ibid.*

³ Merianne R. Spencer; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), "Drug Overdose Mortality by State," March 1, 2022,

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/drug_poisoning_mortality/drug_poisoning.htm; Rose A. Rudd, Noah Aleshire, Jon E. Zibbell & R. Matthew Gladden, "Increases in Drug and Opioid Overdose Deaths – United States, 2000-2014," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 64, 50 (2016): 1378-1382,

www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6450a3.htm.

⁴ CDC, "Drug Overdose Mortality by State."

⁵ Farida B. Ahmad et al., "Provisional drug overdose death counts," *Centers for Disease Control & Prevention*, April 12, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Drug Overdose Death Rates," February 9, 2023, <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>.

⁸ Rina Ghose, Amir M. Forati & John R. Mantsch, "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Opioid Overdose Deaths: a

Spatiotemporal Analysis,” *Journal of Urban Health* 99, 2 (2022): 316-327,

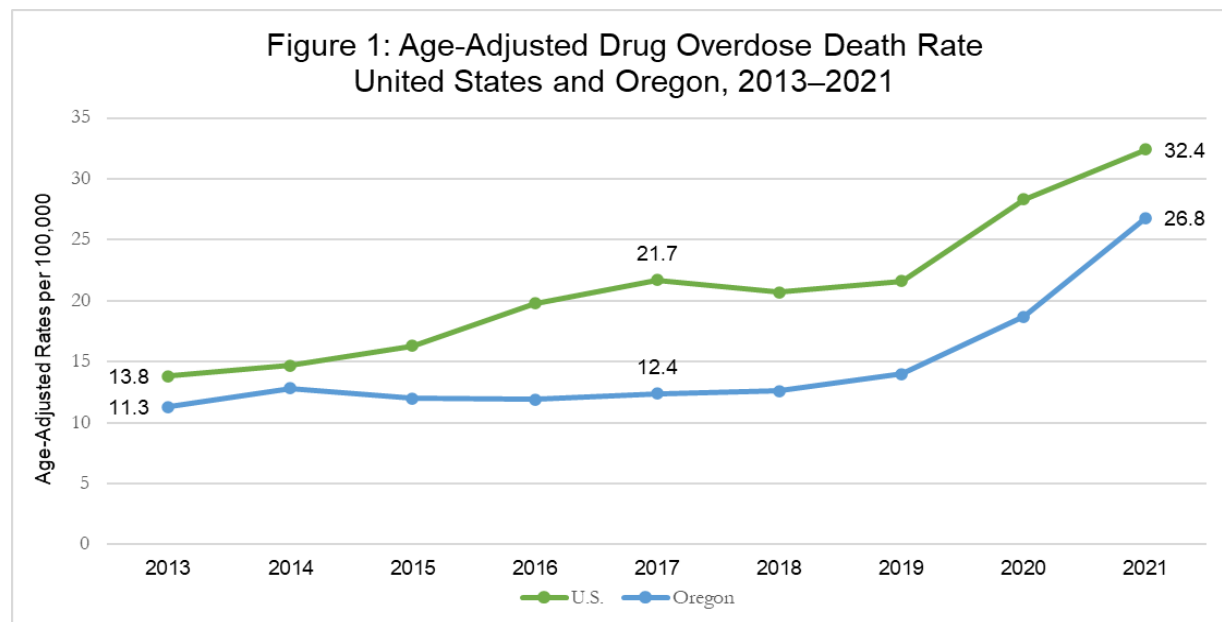
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8856931/>.

⁹ Oregon Health Authority, “Unintentional Drug Overdose in Oregon: The Current and Potential Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *CD Summary* 71, 2, (2022),

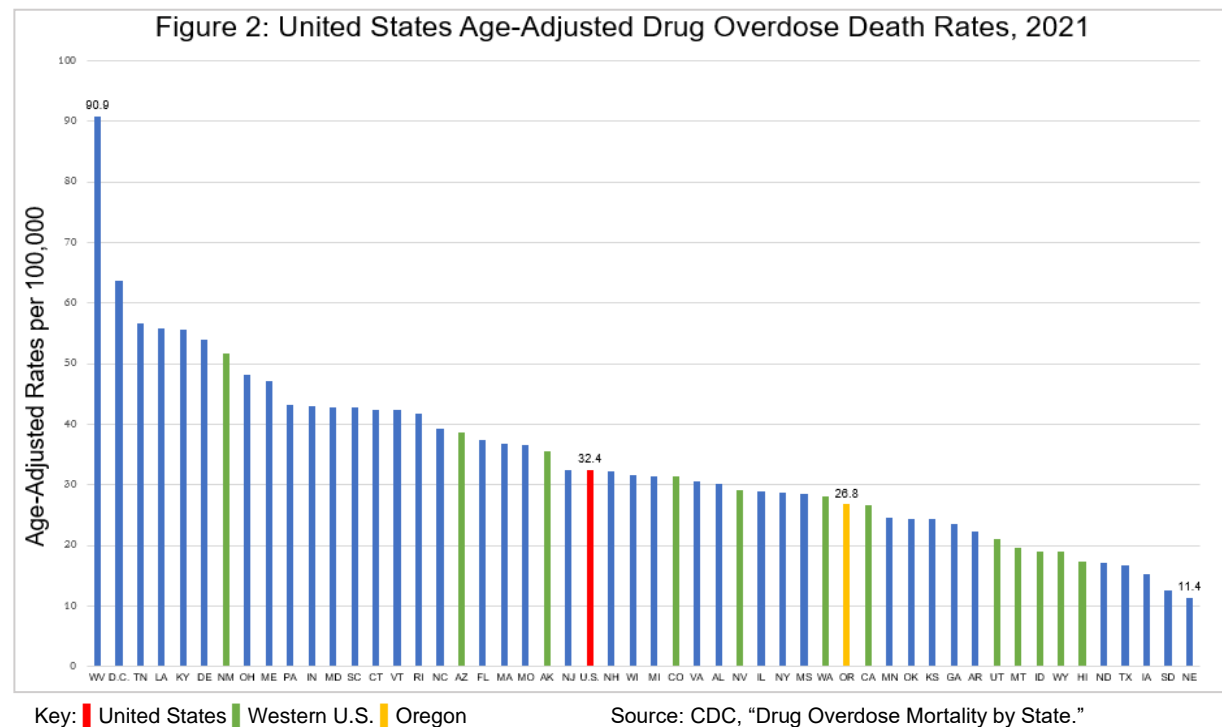
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/COMMUNICABLEDISEASE/CDSUMMARYNEWSLETTER/Documents/2022/ohd7102.pdf>.

¹⁰ Chelsea L. Shover et al., “Steep increases in fentanyl-related mortality west of the Mississippi River: Recent evidence from county and state surveillance,” *Drug & Alcohol Dependence* 216, Nov. (2020): 108314.

¹¹ Ahmad et al., “Provisional drug overdose death counts”; Oregon Health Authority, “Unintentional Drug Overdose in Oregon.”



Sources: Spencer, Miniño & Warner, “Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States, 2001-2021”; CDC, “Drug Overdose Mortality by State”; Rudd, Aleshire, Zibbell & Gladden, “Increases in Drug and Opioid Overdose Deaths.”



Key: United States Western U.S. Oregon

Source: CDC, “Drug Overdose Mortality by State.”