



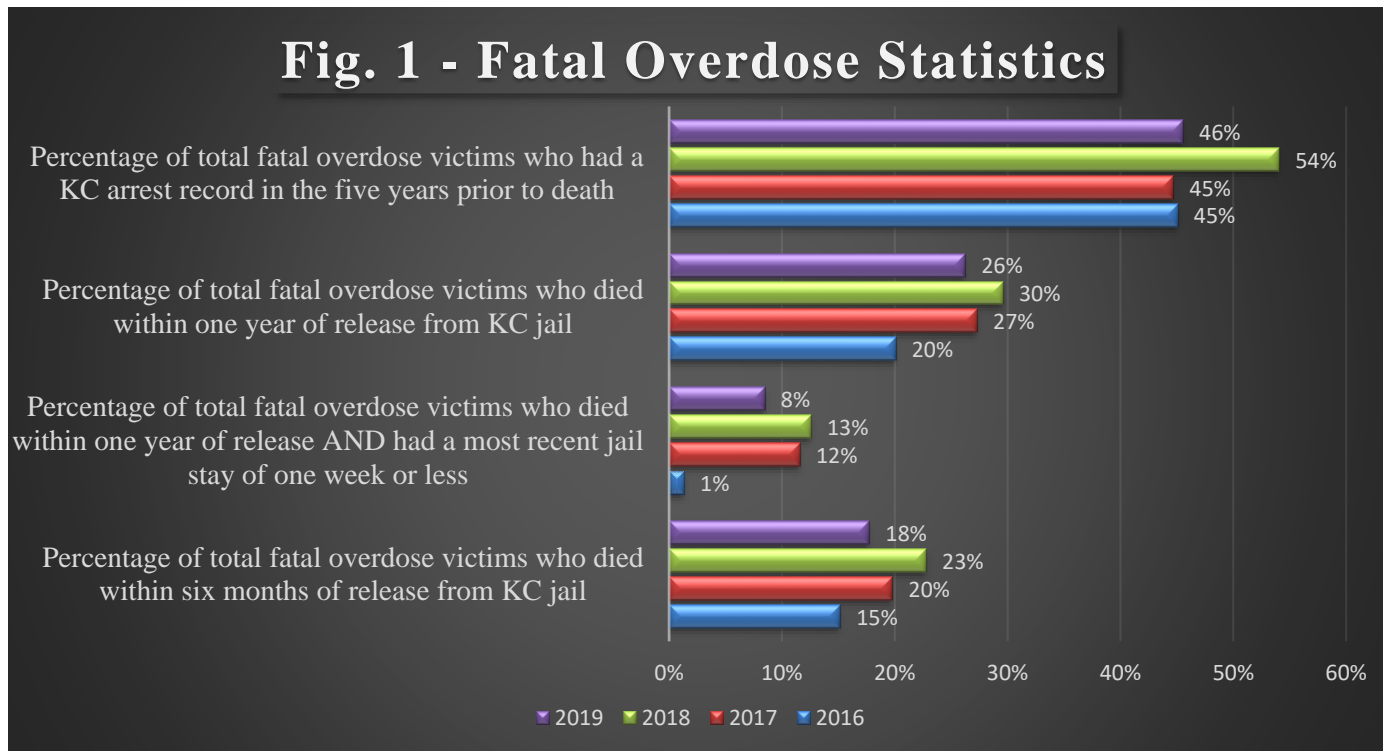
Fatal Overdose Victims & the Criminal Justice System

2019 Report

In partnership with the community, Knox County District Attorney General Charne Allen has experienced success in fighting the community’s substance abuse epidemic by reducing access to dangerous drugs and the illegal distribution of prescription drugs. Additionally, General Allen and her office have helped introduce innovative prevention initiatives and jail-based and community-based treatment programs. The data in this report can be used to help reduce the impact of substance misuse in Knox County. Together, the community can reduce crime and victimization, and prevent overdose deaths.

In 2019, 293 people died in Knox County due to a drug overdose. The number of overdoses countywide has decreased by 9.8 percent from 2018 to 2019. Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues (synthetic opioids) continued to be the most frequently identified drugs in drug-related deaths. The Knox County Regional Forensic Center’s most recent Drug Related Death Report indicates that the top five drugs found through autopsies in Knox County are synthetic opioids, methamphetamine, alcohol/ethanol, heroin, and cocaine.¹

The total number of fatal overdose cases reviewed by the District Attorney General’s Office and the Drug Related Death Task Force in 2019 is 259. This number excludes fatal overdose cases if the cause of death is alcohol intoxication or suicide, or if the incident originated from outside of Knox County. The following data details contact between local law enforcement and individuals who fatally overdosed in Knox County (KC). The table below includes 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 statistics.



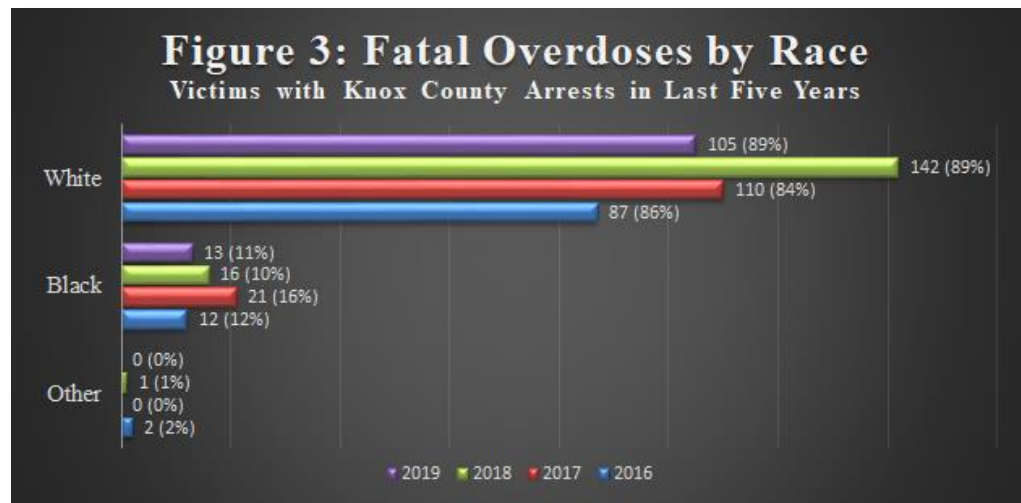
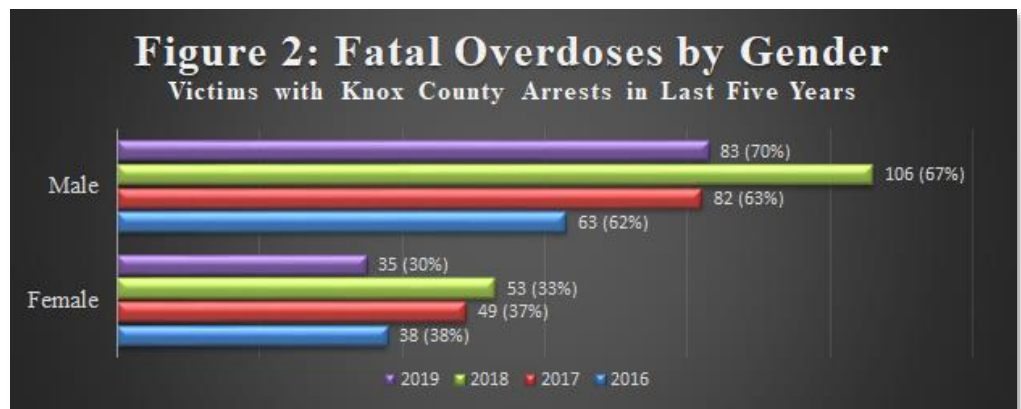
Note: The algorithm for calculating the fatal overdose statistics was revised for the 2018 report. This caused the yearly statistics from previous reports to fluctuate slightly.

The number of people who fatally overdose and have recent interactions with law enforcement continues to be high and indicates an opportunity for community partnership. 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 as this report continues to suggest, it can save lives.²

For the first time since producing the Fatal Overdose Victims & the Criminal Justice System Report, the number of overdose deaths investigated by the Drug Related Death Task Force decreased. Additionally, as shown in Figure 1, nearly half of people who fatally overdosed had an arrest record in the five years prior to their death, presenting a 14.8 percent decrease from 2018 to 2019.

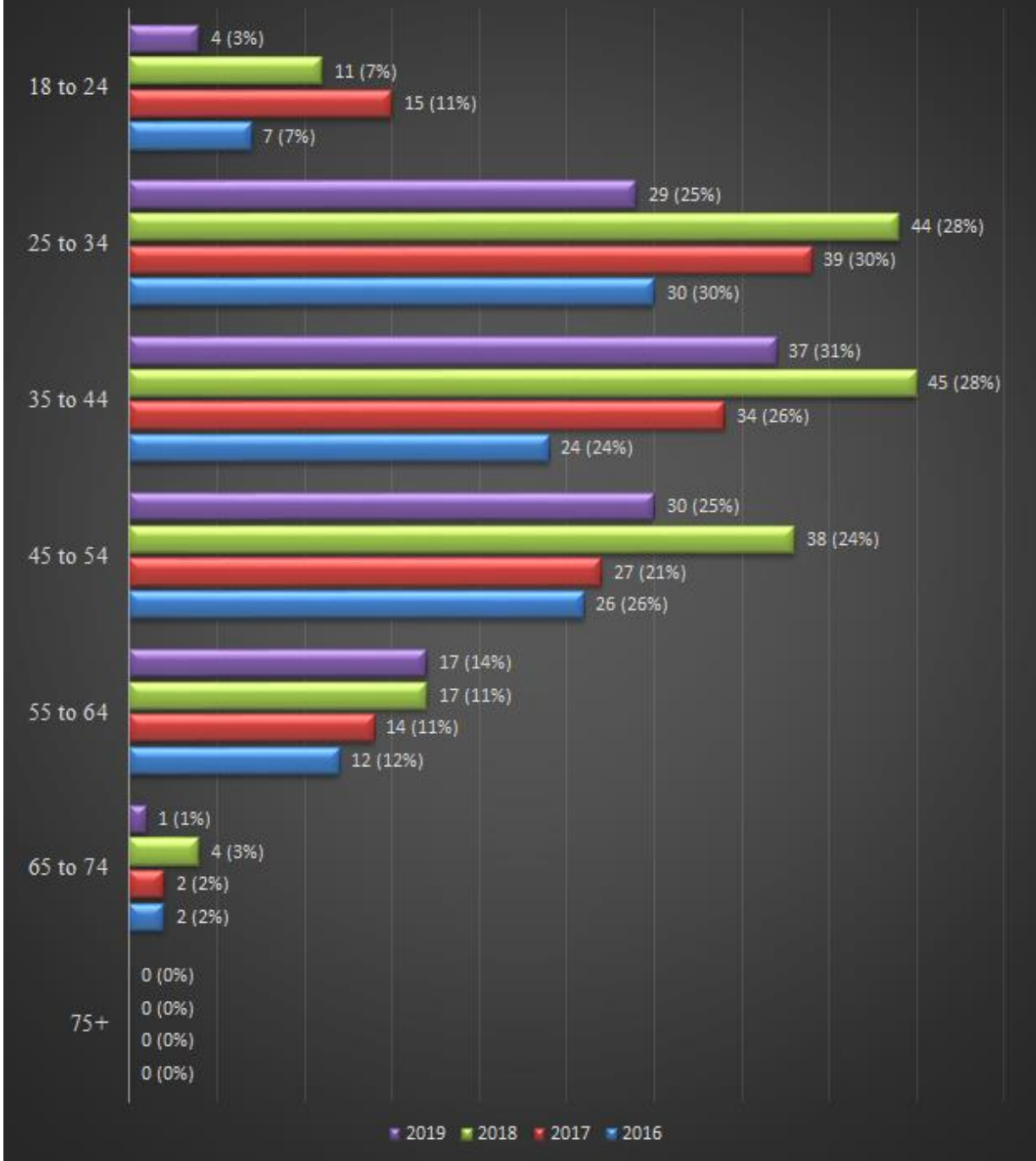
In 2019, 26 percent of those who died were released from jail sometime in the year before their death. In 2017 and 2018, nearly half of those individuals had a most recent jail stay of seven days or less, indicating that many people who fatally overdose and are involved in the criminal justice system have short-term jail stays. The number of individuals who died within one year of release and had a recent short-term jail stay decreased from 13 percent to 8 percent in 2019.

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. 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.³

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.

¹ [Knox County Regional Forensic Center, 2019 Drug Related Death Statistics.](#)

² Fazel, Yoon, and Hayes; 2017 (likelihood of SUDs in incarcerated people). Brinkley-Rubenstein et al., 2018 (opportunities to receive treatment). Binswanger et al., 2007 (national data about post-release vulnerability).

³ [Knox County District Attorney General's Office, Suspected Overdose Death Statistics.](#)