

The Status of Prescription Drug Abuse in Los Angeles County: 2008-2013

Prescription drug abuse has become one of the fastest-growing public health concerns in the United States and Los Angeles County (LAC). The number of deaths from prescription opioids now exceeds the combined number of deaths involving heroin and cocaine. Health care providers can play a significant role in addressing this growing problem. Thus, the LAC Prescription Drug Abuse Medical Task Force, a multi-disciplinary coalition, was formed to develop common principles among all 81 LA county Emergency Departments on the safe use of opioid pain medications.

This Score Card reviews the scale of the prescription drug abuse problem in Los Angeles County by looking at multiple factors and data points over the last six years. Readers are encouraged to look at all of the information as well as the direction of the trends over time.

Los Angeles County Prescription Drug (Rx) Abuse 2008-2013 Score Card

	INDICATOR	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1	Rx Opioid-Related Deaths¹						Pending
	• Number	424	434	360	386	381	
	• Rate Per 100,000 residents	4.3	4.4	3.7	3.9	3.8	
2	Rx-Related Emergency Dept. Visits						
	• Number	3,423	3,803	4,677	4,862	5,218	Pending
	• Rate Per 100,000 residents	34.7	38.6	47.6	49.3	52.7	
3	Rx-Related Hospitalizations						
	• Number	2,946	2,934	3,205	3,127	2,913	
	• Rate Per 100,000 residents	29.9	29.8	32.6	31.7	29.4	Pending
4	Primary Rx Treatment Admissions						
	• Number	1,048	1,192	1,241	1,114	1,743	
	• Rate Per 100,000 residents	10.7	12.1	12.6	11.3	17.5	
5	Rx Misuse among Students (Life Time)²						
	• 9th graders	N/A	11%	11%	11%	N/A	11%
	• 11th graders		15%	16%	14%		15%
6	Pharmacy Robberies/Burglaries						
		N/A	64	31	63	61	Pending
7	Pounds of Safely Disposed Medications						
	• Take Back Events	N/A		2,935	16,965	19,064	22,657
	• Sheriff Dept. Collection Boxes		4,113	9,546	10,295	20,679	Pending
8	Rx Pill Counts						
	Opioids³						Pending
	• Per resident				26	25	
	• Per prescription				61	60	
	Sedatives				18	17	
	• Per resident				44	44	
	• Per prescription						
	Stimulants				3	4	
	• Per resident				57	55	
	• Per prescription						

1. Rx opioid-related deaths include the number of drug-related deaths that tested positive for Rx opioids. Many of these deaths tested positive for multiple substances and it is not possible to determine if the Rx opioid was actually the cause of death.
2. California Healthy Kids Survey is administered for two-school year period. For example, the 2009 data in this table is aggregated for both 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school year survey data.
3. Opioids include only pills; solution-based and liquid-type prescriptions were not included in the count.

Additional Statistics on Prescription Drug (Rx) Indicators

Drug Treatment

Data on the publicly funded treatment admissions in Los Angeles County reflect the availability of treatment, which varies according to funding and other factors. Thus, they don't necessarily reflect total treatment needs among all drug users.

Figure 1: Percent of Primary Drug of Choice for Admissions to Los Angeles County Publicly Funded Treatment Programs

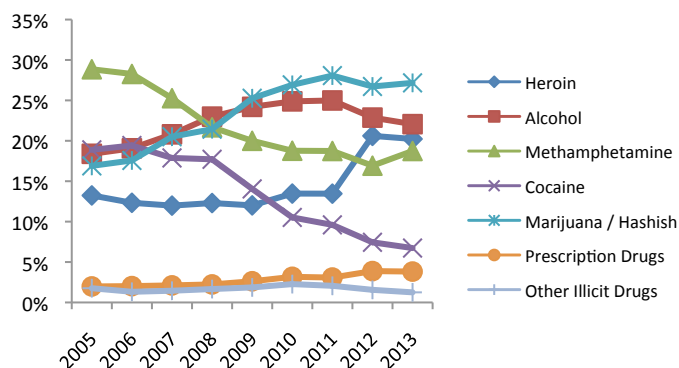
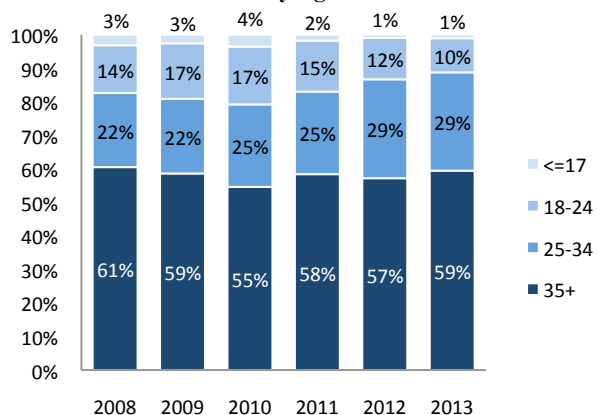


Figure 2: Primary Rx Treatment Admissions by Age



Percent of heroin treatment admissions have been increasing for the last two years (Figure 1). Prescription drug treatment admissions were most common among persons aged 35 and older (Figure 2). LACPRS data, however, likely underestimate the number of prescription drug treatment admission episodes in Los Angeles County because they do not include data from privately funded treatment programs.

Figure 3: Multi-Drug Detected in Drug Related Deaths in Los Angeles County, 2000-2012

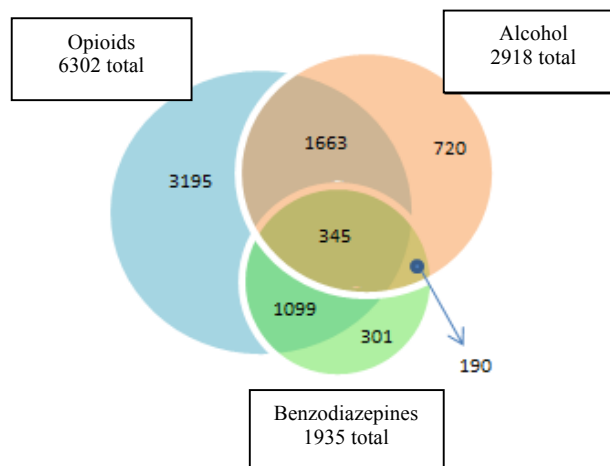


Figure 3 displays data for 13 years of drug related deaths, and shows how prescription opioids are frequently combined with other drugs. This is important because opioids have additive effects when combined with other substances such as alcohol and benzodiazepines, potentially increasing respiratory depression and increased risk for overdose death. Almost half of the deaths testing positive for opioids during this time involve combinations with either alcohol or benzodiazepines or both.

Drug Retail Price

A large variety of pills are sold and the price often depends on the amount bought. Overall the average prices remain stable: Vicodin 10mg. per tablet sold for \$1-5 in 2008 and \$3 in 2013. Xanax 4mg. per pill sold for \$1-2 in 2012 and \$2-5 in 2013. However, the price of Oxycontin pill (80mg.) dropped significantly from \$80 in 2009 to \$10-14 in 2013. This may be because of an effort to capture existing Oxycontin users, and prevent them from switching to Black Tar Heroin, which is cheaper than a single Oxycontin pill.

Heroin Addendum

Heroin abuse is growing nationwide. In LAC, heroin seizures have increased between 2008 and 2010 and heroin treatment admissions increased in 2012. There is speculation that the prescription drug abuse epidemic may be contributing to this trend, as users switch to the cheaper heroin after prescription opioids become harder to find and more expensive. According to LA CLEAR, Mexican Black Tar heroin prices have dropped slightly starting since the spring of 2012. This is believed to be the Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations' efforts to expand their heroin market by appealing to former Oxycontin Users in affluent areas. Other indicators of the heroin problem are listed below.

Los Angeles County Heroin Abuse 2008-2013							
	INDICATOR	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1	Heroin-Related Deaths⁴ <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">NumberRate Per 100,000 residents</div>	244 2.5	223 2.3	196 2.0	226 2.3	186 1.9	Pending
2	Primary Heroin Treatment Admissions <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Number RateRate Per 100,000 residents</div>	5,781 59.1	5,458 55.4	5,273 53.7	4,862 49.2	9,259 93.0	
3	Heroin Use among Students (Life Time)² <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">9th graders11th graders</div>	N/A	3% 3%	4% 4%	4% 3%	N/A	3% 2%
4	Heroin Seizures (Kgs) <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Los Angeles County</div>		63	149	254		Pending
5	Heroin Retail Price per Gram <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Mexican Black Tar Heroin</div>	\$80	\$80	\$80	\$80	\$60-100	\$55-100

Figure 1: Primary Heroin Treatment Admissions, by Age

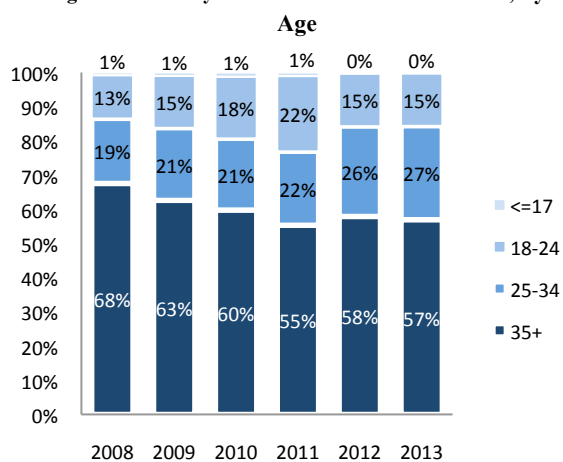
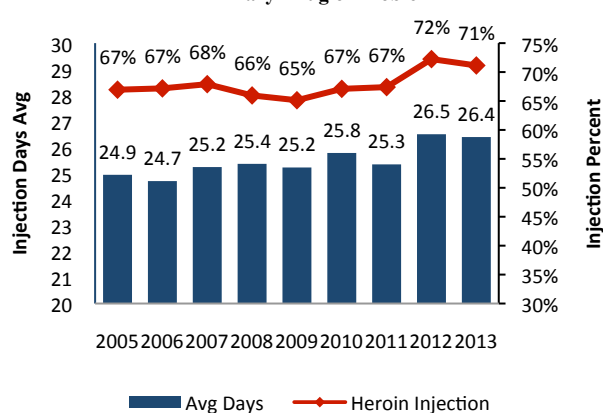


Figure 2: Heroin Injection Experience in the Past 30 Days among Clients who Reported Heroin as a Primary Drug of Problem



Heroin treatment admission rates have been increasing among persons aged 25-34, but have decreased among persons aged 35 and older (Figure 1). Heroin injection rates and days of injection among clients who reported heroin as a primary drug of problem have slightly increased during the last two years (Figure 2).

- Heroin-related deaths include drug related deaths that test positive for heroin (6-monoacetylmorphine) and drug-related deaths that test positive for morphine along with a mention of heroin in one of the descriptive variables about the death. This is because heroin metabolizes very quickly to morphine, so this method provides a more accurate count of heroin-related deaths.

Looking Forward

The LAC Prescription Drug Abuse Medical Task Force will continue collecting data to inform priorities for action. The Task Force has developed the safe opioid pain medication prescribing guidelines and language and communication tools for patients (handouts and posters); and will also track implementation of the use of handout and outcomes (e.g., number of opioid prescriptions, patient satisfaction). This County-wide approach is intended to decrease doctor and Emergency Department shopping, increase provider and patient education, and ensure that safer care is provided for patients suffering from chronic pain.

Become Involved in Keeping Los Angeles County Healthy, Safe and Thriving

You can make a difference!

- ✓ Safely dispose of your old prescriptions at a Take Back Event or local LA County Sheriff's Safe-Drug Drop-Off Boxes (http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/index.html; <http://shq.lasdnnews.net/content/uoa/SHB/SafeDrugDropOff.pdf>)
- ✓ Keep track of your medicine and secure it.
- ✓ Don't share your own medications, or use medications prescribed to someone else.
- ✓ Share this information and talk to your family members and neighbors about the risks involved with the misuse of prescription drugs.

Type and Source for Score Card Indicators

1. Rx opioid and heroin related deaths and interaction among substance detected in drug related death. *Source:* Los Angeles County Coroner Data, Drug Related Death Surveillance System, Injury and Violence Prevention Program.
- 2-3. Rx related Emergency Department visits and hospitalizations. *Source:* Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, Emergency Department and Hospital Discharge Data, 2008-2011.
4. Primary Rx and heroin treatment admissions and injection experience. *Source:* Los Angeles County Participant Reporting System data, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Control.
5. Rx and heroin misuse among students. *Source:* Los Angeles County. California Healthy Kids Survey. 2008-13; Main Report San Francisco: WestEd Health and Human Development Program for the California Department of Education.
6. Pharmacy Robberies/Burglaries. *Source:* Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Los Angeles Field Division (LAFD).
7. Pounds of safely disposed medications at Rx Tack Back Events. *Source:* DEA. Pounds collected at Sheriff Dept. Safe-Drug Drop-Off Boxes. *Source:* Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.
8. Rx pill counts. *Source:* Department of Justice, California Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System (CURES)/Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) data.

Note: The heroin seizures and Rx/heroin retail price information source: LA CLEAR: Los Angeles Regional Criminal Information Clearinghouse.

Thank you to our partners at the San Diego Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force who provided guidance in creating this Score Card and DEA Los Angeles Field Division's data support .