

Regional Advisory Board (RAB) of Community Anti-Drug Coalitions

November 2021 Newsletter

Did You Know?

Report Shows Decreases in Opioid Prescribing, Increase in Overdoses

The American Medical Association (AMA) released a report indicating that there has been a 44.4% decrease in opioid prescribing in the past decade. However, the country is still facing increased drug-related overdose and deaths. The AMA hopes to address the epidemic by removing barriers to evidence-based care by asking policymakers to work with physicians to reduce mortality and improve patient outcomes. Overdose deaths are increasing even as physicians have increased their use of drug monitoring programs from 750 million times in 2019 to 910 million times in 2020. Prescription drug monitoring programs help physicians identify patients who are receiving multiple prescriptions. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention attributes this increase to the illicit use of fentanyl and its analogs, methamphetamine and cocaine. Data from the National Institutes of Health and other health services shows that that Black, Latinx, and American Indian/Native Alaskan populations face additional challenges and inequities. The AMA is encouraging policy makers to stop prior authorization, ensure access to affordable evidence-based care, improve data collection, and better support for naloxone, syringe exchange and other harm reduction services to combat this epidemic. (Indiana Department of Health, 10/5/21)

Methamphetamine Use Disorder and Associated Overdose Deaths

Overdose deaths involving methamphetamines have increased by 180% between 2015 and 2019, while any use of methamphetamines increased by 43% in the same time frame. Using data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), the authors examined changes in patterns of methamphetamine use to identify at-risk populations or patterns of use that may be potential targets for interventions. Overall, the populations who use methamphetamines have diversified, specifically: 1) increases in use across all racial groups, but a 10-fold increase of methamphetamine use disorder (MUD) among black persons, and 2) 300% increase in MUD among persons age 18 to 23. Methamphetamine use patterns have also changed; the study found 1) increasing trends in using methamphetamines and opioids, 2) 60% increase in use in methamphetamines and cocaine, 3) 105% increase in MUD, and 4) 66% increase in frequent methamphetamine use. The study further found that persons with lower socioeconomic status, criminal justice involvement, or polysubstance use had a higher prevalence of methamphetamine use. (ASAM Weekly, 10/5/21)

Methamphetamine Deaths Soar, Hitting Black And Native Americans

Especially Hard. Research from the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) shows that Native Americans and Alaska Natives have a higher rate of

methamphetamine use disorder. Methamphetamine-linked deaths rose from 5,526 in 2015 to 15,489 in 2019 in the United States. For Black Americans specifically, there was a tenfold increase in methamphetamine use over these five years. Along with the increase in frequency of use, researchers have also seen an increase in intravenous use of the substance and a boost in combining methamphetamine with other drugs. Although the data discussed was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, preliminary information shows an even higher increase in the last 12 months. The CDC shows that approximately 96,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in the previous 12 months; 15-20% involve methamphetamines. There are no medications approved to assist in treating methamphetamine use disorder. (Indiana Department of Health, 10/5/21)

Xylazine Spreads Across the USA

Recently, the substance abuse crisis in the United States has seen increased overdose deaths due to polysubstance use and synthetic compounds. Recently the use of xylazine, an animal tranquilizer, has been detected in higher rates in illicitly-manufactured-fentanyl. Initially, this drug was seen as an additive in unregulated drugs in Puerto Rico. In 2019, the CDC detected xylazine in 25 of 38 states recently examined for substance overdose deaths. Of the cases examined, in 64.3%, xylazine was determined as the cause of overdose death, and for other 925 cases, it was detected but not noted as a contributor to overdose death. In a study including data from all four U.S. regions, xylazine was involved in 6.7% of overdose deaths, an increase from 0.36% in 2015. Philadelphia, the area with the highest prevalence of xylazine use, showed 25.8% of overdose deaths included the presence of xylazine. Maryland and Connecticut followed with 19.3% and 10.2% of overdose deaths involving xylazine. The CDC states that cases of xylazine-involved overdoses may be higher due to the potentially missed detection of the drug. (Indiana Department of Health, 10/12/21)

20% of surgical patients who start taking prescription opioids after their procedure continue to take them three months after surgery, a new study finds. Few patients should still need opioids three months after surgery unless they have cancer or had chronic pain before the procedure, the researchers said. "The more than 100 million surgeries in the U.S. every year create an unintended and alarming gateway to long-term opioid use," lead author Gia Pittet of UCLA said. The study included data from almost 14,000 adults who had surgery between 2013 and 2019, HealthDay reports. None had filled a prescription for an opioid painkiller for up to a year before their surgery. After the surgery, they were prescribed opioids to control pain. One-fifth of patients refilled their prescription between three months and one year after their operation. Dr. Pittet said surgery patients should receive counseling about the safe use of opioids and be offered alternative pain management choices. They should be monitored frequently and closely while they are taking opioids, Dr. Pittet said. (drugfree.org, 10/14/21)

For more information, email kelly.sickafoose@comcast.net.