

# Vermont Social Autopsy Report: Identifying Patterns in 2024 Overdose Deaths

## Part One: Demographics and Overdose Circumstances

June 2026

The Vermont Social Autopsy Project was created to improve our understanding and reduce the number of drug-related overdose deaths across the state. By analyzing data from multiple state agencies, our goal is to uncover patterns in how people interacted with various systems before their deaths, identifying opportunities for earlier support and intervention. The findings are valuable assets for informing our collective work to prevent future losses of life due to overdose.



New in 2026, the Social Autopsy will be presented as a series of data briefs instead of one long report. These briefs focus on Vermont residents who died in Vermont in 2024. The [methodology](#) for data matching and analysis remains the same as in previous iterations. This brief is the first in the series and examines data from Vermont Vital Statistics and the Vermont State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS). Vital Statistics provides death certificate data, while SUDORS contains more detailed information on the circumstances surrounding overdose deaths.

This project is dedicated to the people who died of overdose and their loved ones. While the work is data-driven, we must not lose sight of the fact that each data point represents a Vermonter who lost their life. The Vermont Department of Health, along with our partners, analyze these data in the context of this humanity.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact Vermont's Overdose Data to Action team at [AHS.VDHod2a@vermont.gov](mailto:AHS.VDHod2a@vermont.gov).

## Death Certificate Information

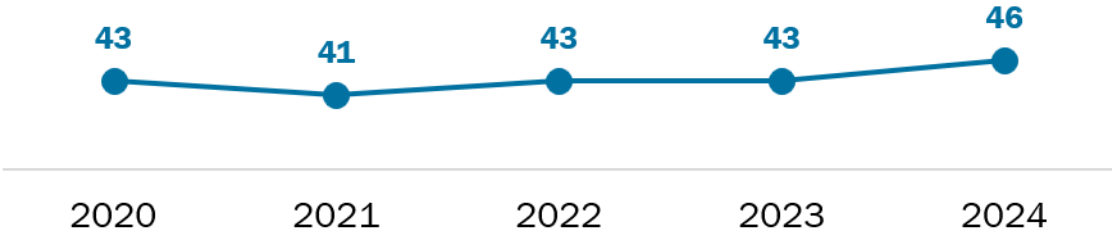
### Demographics of Vermonters Who Died of an Overdose

In 2024, 213 Vermont residents died of an accidental or undetermined manner overdose in Vermont. Most Vermonters who died of an overdose were male (72%), between the ages of 35 and 54 years old (57%) and were white and non-Hispanic (WNH) (95%). Most people had high school education or less (75%) and about half had never been married (48%).

## How do the demographics of Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 compare to those who died in previous years?

There were no statistical differences between 2024 and prior years for either sex or race. The age of people dying of overdose in Vermont is trending slightly older, however the only statistical difference in age groups was a decrease in people in the 25-34 years category in 2024 compared to 2020 (16% vs 26%). The median age of people who died of an overdose has increased since 2021.

### The median age of Vermonters who died of an overdose in Vermont has increased from 41 years in 2021 to 46 in 2024.



## How do the demographics of Vermonters who died of an overdose compare to those who died of any cause?

The demographics of people who died of an overdose (N=213) are statistically different compared to Vermonters who died of any cause (N=5892).

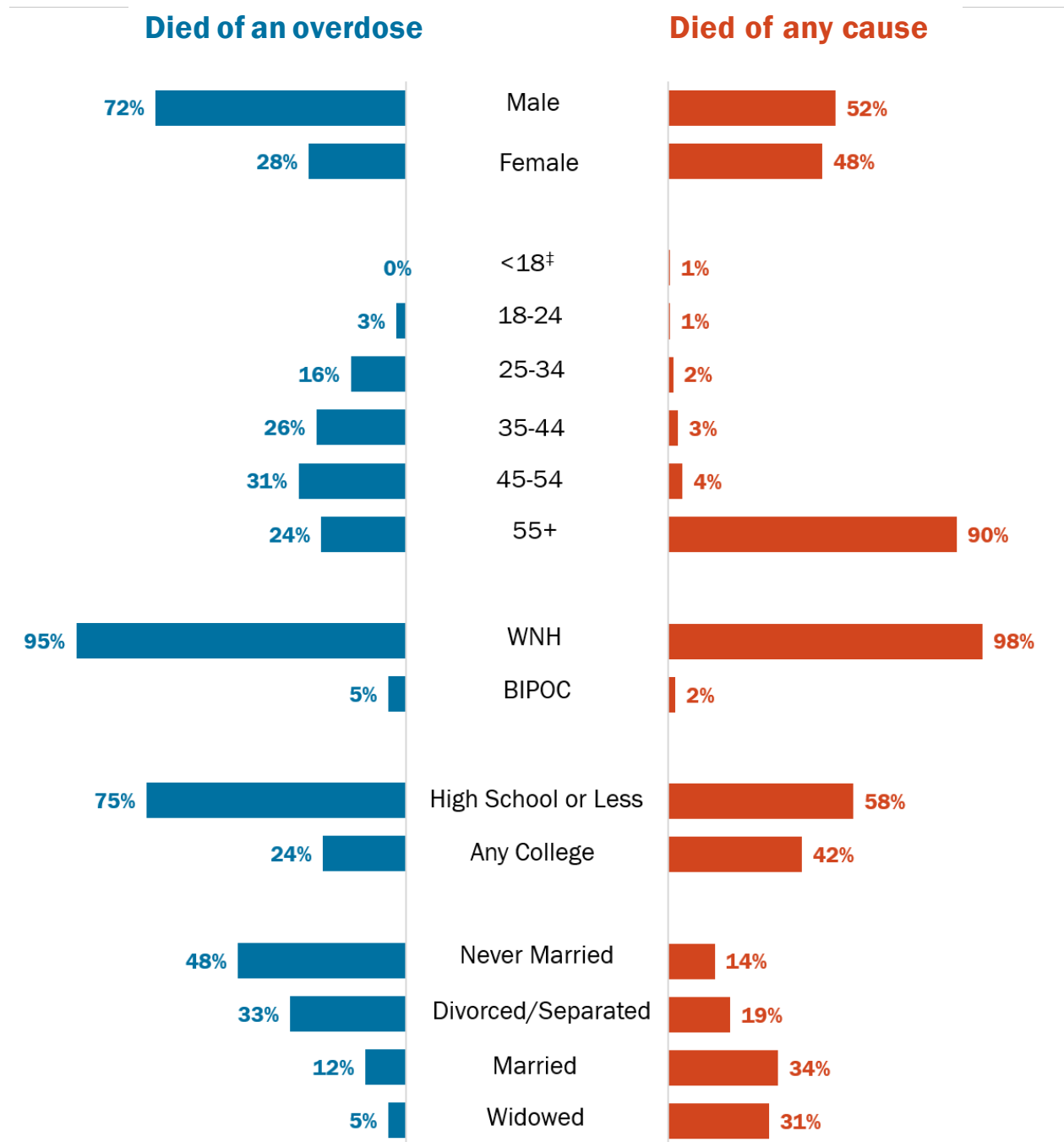
**Sex:** In 2024, about half of people who died of any cause were male (52%), while nearly three-quarters of people who died of an overdose were male (72%).

**Age:** Vermonters who died of an overdose died at a younger age than other Vermonters. While most Vermonters who died of any cause were 55 years old or older (90%), only one-quarter of people who died of overdose were in that age group (24%).

**Race and Ethnicity:** A higher percentage of Vermonters who died of an overdose were Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) (5%) compared to Vermonters who died of any cause (2%).

**Education and Relationships:** A higher percentage of Vermonters who died of an overdose had a high school education or less (75%) compared to Vermonters who died of any cause (58%). About one in seven people who died of any cause had never been married (14%) compared to about half of the people who died of an overdose (48%).

**Demographics differ between Vermonters who died of an overdose and Vermonters who died of any cause.**

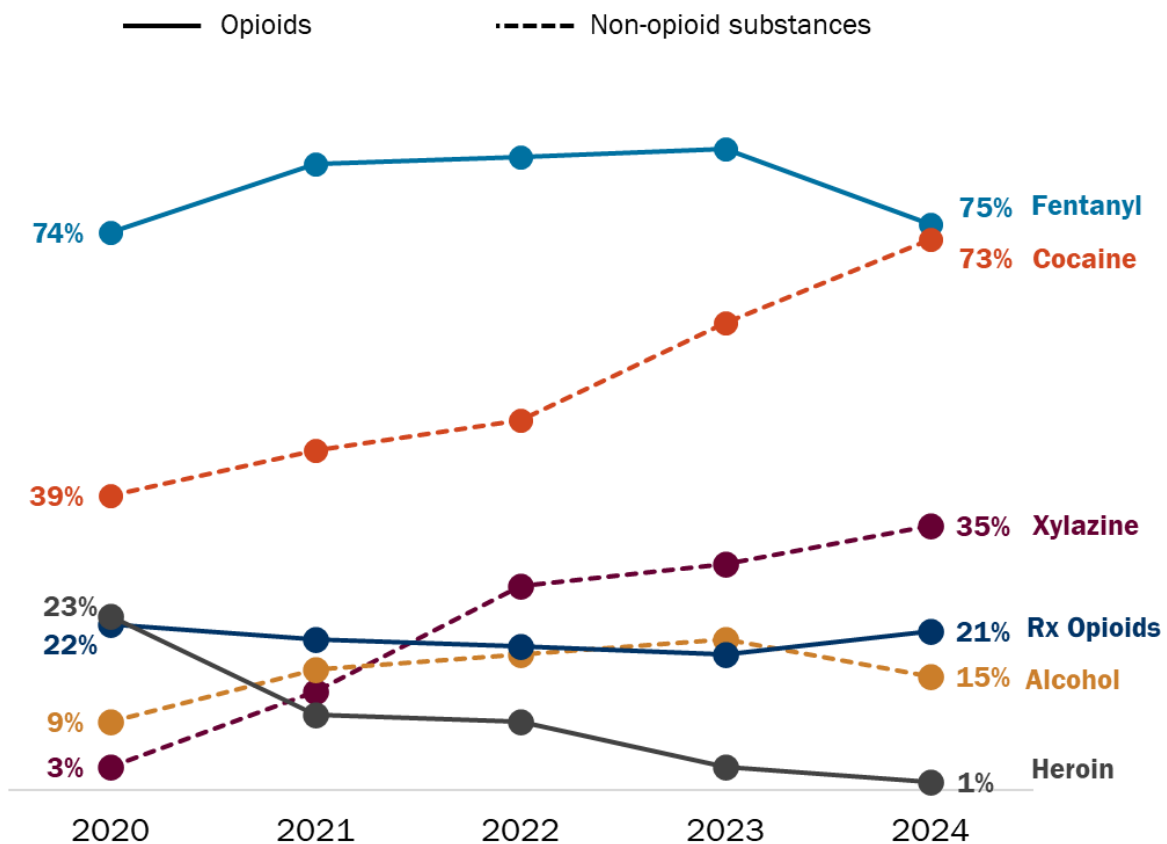


† All categories are statistically different between those who died of an overdose and those who died of any cause except for the <18 age group.

## Drug Involvement

- Most people who died of an overdose in Vermont in 2024 had an opioid in their system (81%).
- The most common drug found in overdoses was fentanyl (75%), followed closely by cocaine (73%). Xylazine was the third most common, with 35% of death certificates identifying the drug as contributing to death.
- The percentage of deaths involving cocaine once again statistically increased compared to the previous year, from 62% in 2023 to 73% in 2024.
- Most people had multiple drugs in their system when they died. The most common combination was fentanyl and cocaine (55%), followed by fentanyl and xylazine (35%), and fentanyl, xylazine, and cocaine (25%).

**In 2024, nearly three out of four overdose deaths among Vermonters involved **cocaine**, a significant increase compared to previous years.**



Note: Involvement of each substance is not mutually exclusive.

## Industry of Employment

Death certificates include information about the industry and occupation of people who have died. In this context, these terms refer to the work performed during most of the person’s life. This means that while a person may have been unemployed or retired at the time of their death, their death certificate could still include industry and occupation data. These data are collected for the death certificate through interviews with relatives or others who knew the deceased person, so this information is not always collected consistently, and some data are missing. All percentages presented in this section are out of the 213 people who died in 2024, although 19% were missing industry and occupation information.



	Construction	Accommodation and food services	Other services (excluding public administration) *
<b>Percent of people who died of an overdose</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Percent of Vermont overall</b> (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics)	<b>9%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>

\* Includes the following subsectors: repair and maintenance, personal and laundry services, religious, grantmaking, civic, professional and similar organizations, and private households.

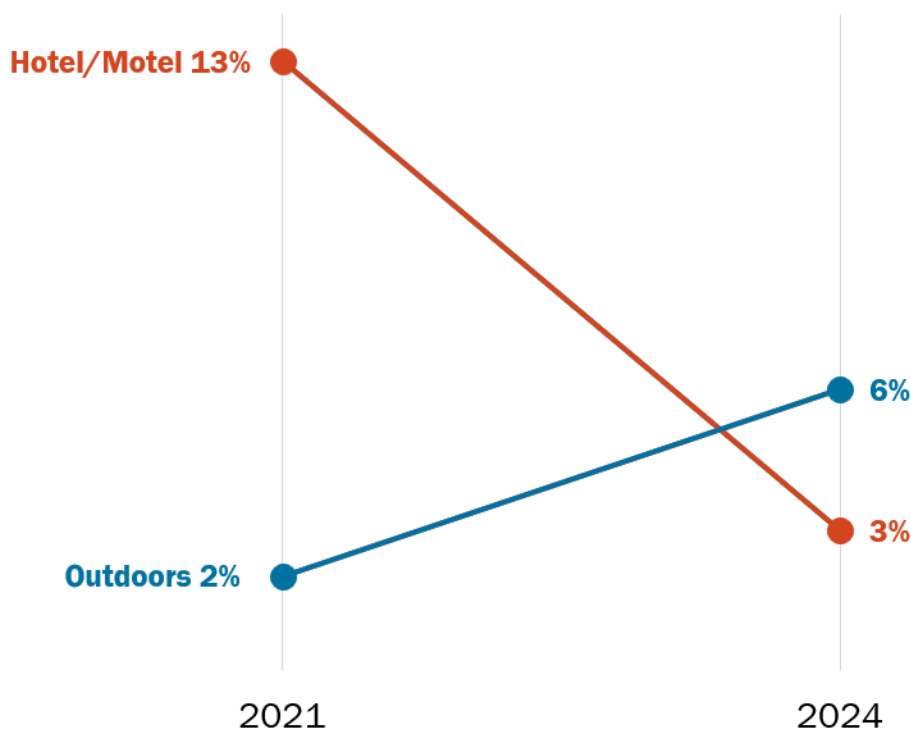
Construction has been the most common industry of employment among people who have died of an overdose in Vermont since at least 2017, when the Social Autopsy Project began. This trend continued in 2024, with one-quarter of people who died of an overdose employed in construction. The next most common industries among people who died of an overdose were accommodation and food services and other services (excluding public administration), with 10% employed in each sector. 2024 is the first year that the other services industry sector has been in the top three. Most people in this category were employed as mechanics or other automotive service occupations.

Compared to all Vermonters working in 2024, the percentages employed in all three of these industries are statistically higher for people who died of an overdose.

## Place of Injury and Death

The place of injury on a person's death certificate describes where the overdose occurred. In 2024, most people experienced a fatal overdose at their home or the home of another person (78%), compared to 72% in 2021. The percent of fatal overdoses that occurred in hotels or motels continued to decline compared to previous years. In 2024, three percent of fatal overdoses occurred in a hotel/motel, compared to six percent in 2023 and 13% in 2021. In 2024, more people experienced a fatal overdose in a public, outdoor location (such as parks, cemeteries, wooded areas or parking lots) than in previous years.\* Six percent of fatal overdoses occurred outside in 2024, compared to two percent in 2021.

**Since 2021, the percentage of overdoses occurring at hotels and motels has decreased while those occurring in public outdoor locations has increased.**



The place of death may be different from where the overdose happened. Most Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 died at either their own home or the home of another person (77%). Eight percent died in a hospital setting (emergency room, intensive care or inpatient).

\* Overdoses that occur in the driveway or yard of a home are counted as occurring at home.

## History and Circumstances Surrounding Overdose

### State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System

- SUDORS collects detailed information on accidental and undetermined deaths from drug overdoses using death certificates, law enforcement reports, medical examiner reports (including toxicology results), electronic medical records, EMS incident records, and prescription drug monitoring data.
- This database includes demographics, overdose-specific circumstances, substances present on toxicology tests, and other reported drug overdose risk factors.
- The availability of SUDORS data is dependent on the amount and type of information obtained during death scene investigation interviews with family, friends and healthcare providers. This means the data below may underestimate the actual values, as the information may not have been reported consistently.

### History of Non-fatal Overdose

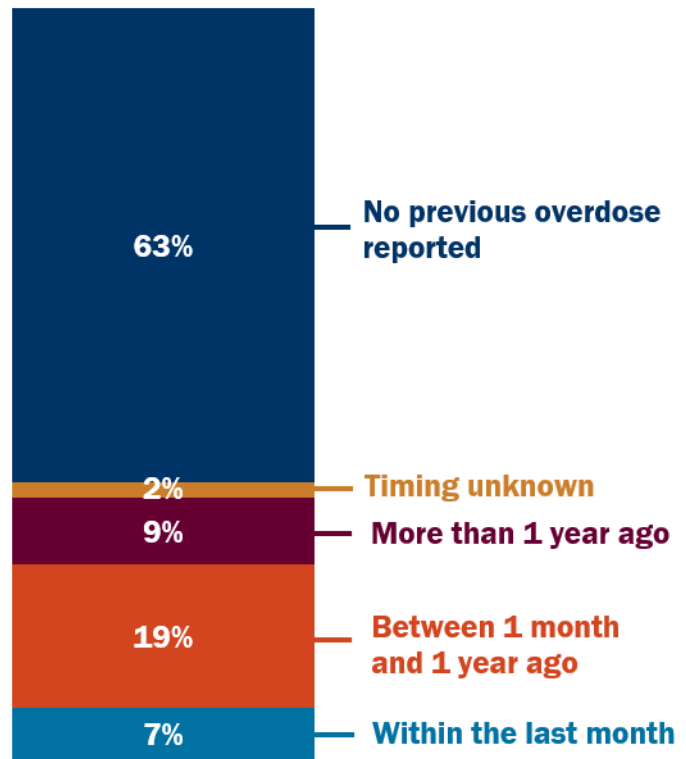
A previous overdose was reported for 37% of people who died of an overdose in 2024. Approximately one in four people experienced a previous overdose within the year before their death (26%), and 7% experienced an overdose in the month before they died.

### Recent Release from an Institution

In this context, an institution refers to a hospital, residential treatment facility, or correctional facility. People recently released from an institution may be at elevated risk for overdose if, for example, their body is not able to tolerate the dose they used prior to admittance to the institution.

In 2024, one in 10 people who died of an overdose had evidence in SUDORS of being released from an institution

**About one in four people experienced a prior overdose within one year before their death.**



within one month of their death. Of the people released from a facility, 35% were released from a hospital, 35% from a correctional facility, and 30% from a residential treatment facility.

## Presence of Other People

The presence of other people during an overdose is an important factor for potentially life-saving intervention. In SUDORS, a potential bystander is defined as someone who was physically nearby during the overdose and had the opportunity to respond to it. A person does not have to witness the drug use that led to the overdose to be a bystander. In 2024, about one-quarter of people who died did not have a potential bystander present at the time of the overdose, and 15% had not been seen or heard from for two or more days before their fatal overdose.

**About one in four people did not have a potential bystander nearby and half were not witnessed using the drug use that led to their fatal overdose.**

