

Vermont Social Autopsy Report: Identifying Patterns in 2024 Overdose Deaths

Part Three: Employment & Financial Assistance

August 2026

This brief is the third in the Social Autopsy series and explores employment and the use of financial assistance among those who died of an overdose in 2024. See [Vermont's Response to Overdose](#) for more information about this year's Social Autopsy Report.

In 2024, **213** Vermonters died of an overdose in Vermont. While the Social Autopsy 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.

The Department of Health partnered with the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) to assess rates of employment, unemployment claims, industry of employment and wages earned among Vermonters who died of a drug overdose in 2024. The Department of Health also partnered with the Economic Services Division (ESD) of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to assess rates of financial assistance use among the same population.

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



Employment Rates and Unemployment Claims

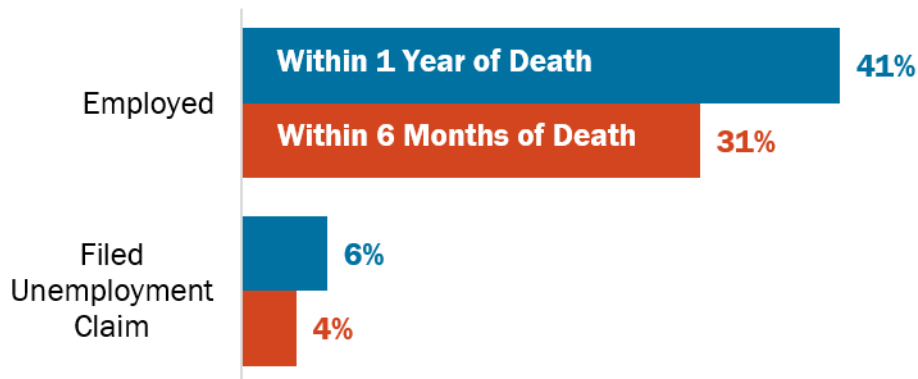
Please consider the following when interpreting these data from the VDOL:

- These data only include jobs in Vermont that are covered by unemployment insurance. For example, most self-employed and agricultural jobs are excluded from the data. Additionally, some Vermonters work in another state and are not included in the data.
- Of the 213 Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024, 189 (89%) had valid Social Security numbers associated with their death certificate. All percentages shown here are out of those 189 people who had valid Social Security numbers.

In 2024, 77 (41%) Vermonters who died of an overdose were employed in Vermont the year before they died, while 59 (31%) were employed in the six months before they died. Eleven people (6%) filed a claim to receive unemployment benefits in the year before

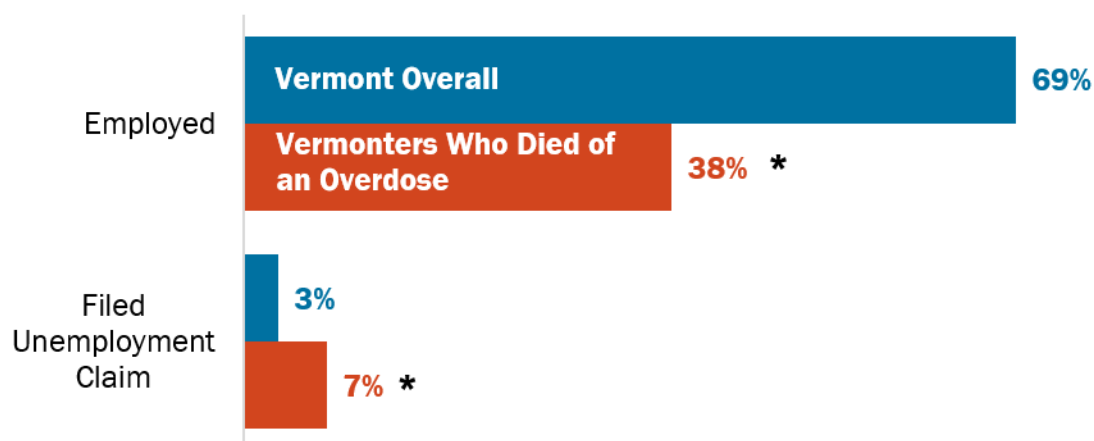
they died, while seven (4%) filed a claim in the six months before they died. People are included in employment percentages if they were employed at any point within the specified time frame. They may not have been employed for the full duration of that time.

One in three Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 were employed within the **six months prior to their overdose death.**



To compare rates of employment and unemployment claims filed between Vermonters who died of an overdose and the Vermont population overall, VDOL analyzed records from 2023 to ensure a full year of employment was represented. Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 had significantly lower employment rates in 2023 compared to Vermont overall (38% vs 69%). Similarly, 7% of Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 filed for unemployment in 2023, compared to 3% of Vermont overall.

Compared to **Vermont overall, 2023 employment rates were significantly lower among **Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024**. Vermonters who died of an overdose also filed unemployment claims at higher rates.**

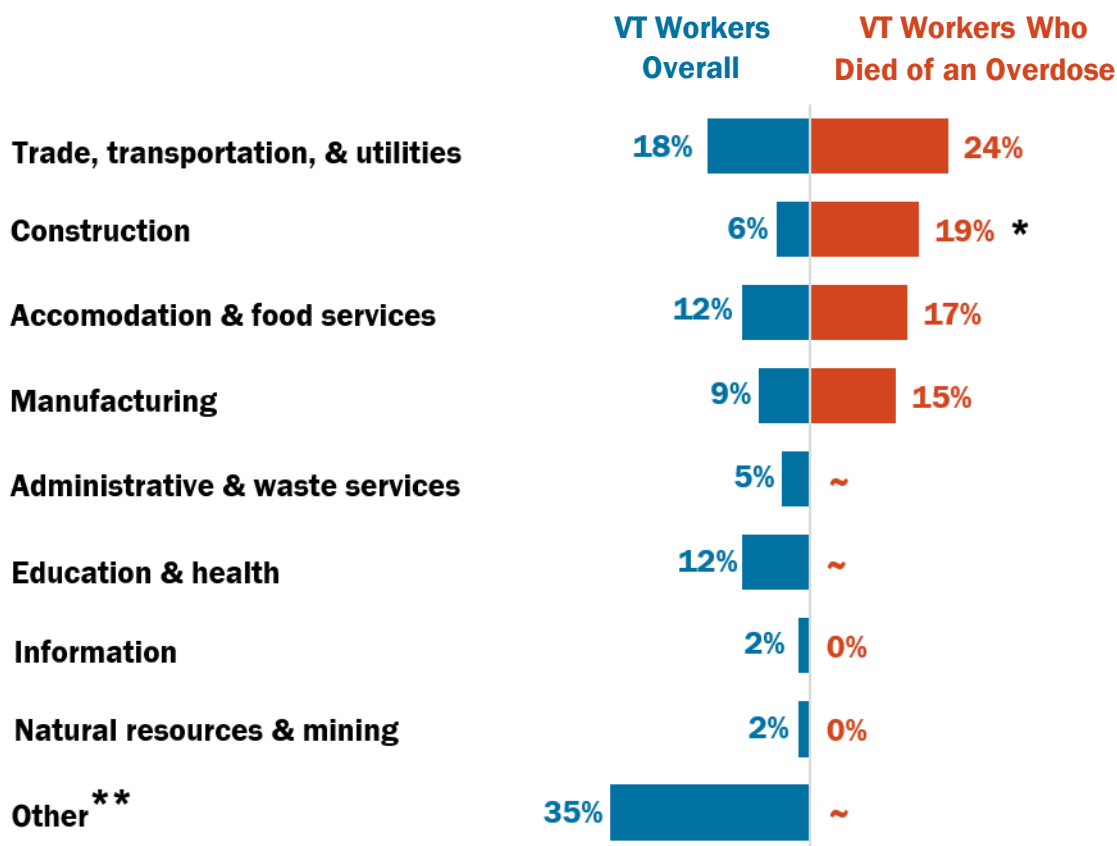


*Statistical difference.

What industries were Vermonters employed in prior to their overdose death?

The following data differ slightly from those presented in the [Demographics and Circumstances brief](#). The data in this brief are from verified employment records from VDOL and refer to the industry where the person worked in 2023. The industry described in the demographic brief refers to the work performed during most of the person's working life and was obtained from death certificate information collected from interviews with family and friends. Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 and were employed in 2023 were statistically more likely to work in construction than Vermont workers overall (19% vs 6%).

The most common industry for Vermont workers who died of an overdose was trade, transportation, and utilities.



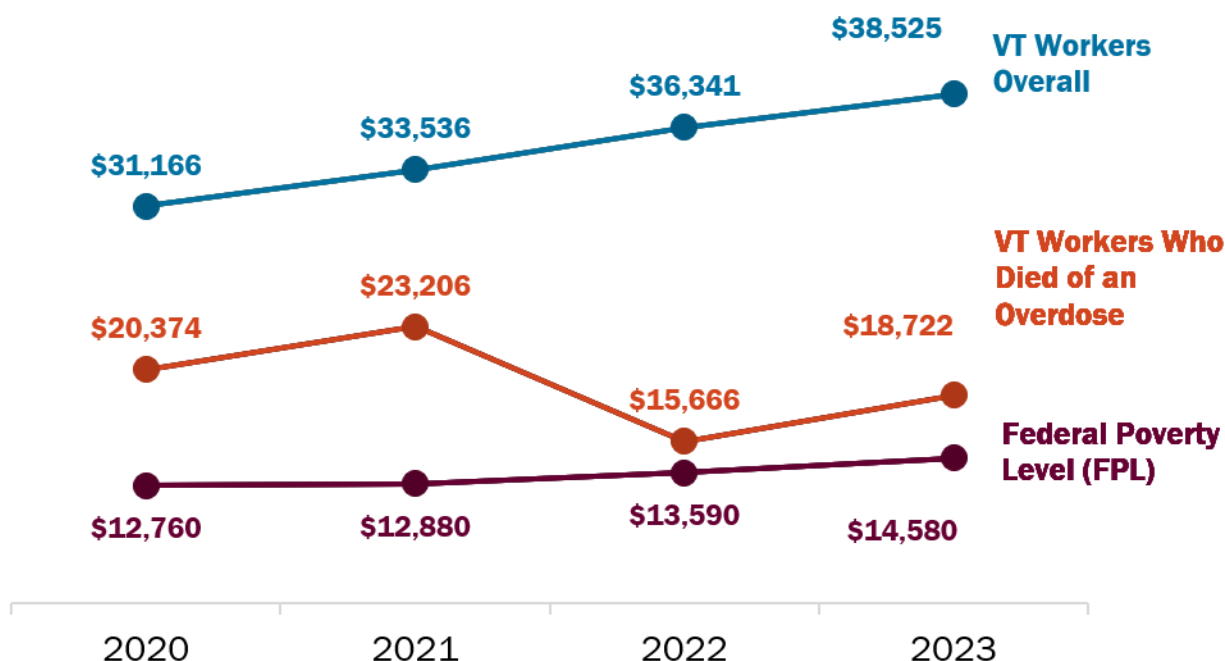
~ Suppressed; *Statistical Difference

** Other includes finance and insurance, real estate, rental, leasing, professional scientific and technical services, management of companies and enterprises, healthcare and social assistance, arts, entertainment, and recreation, public administration, and other.

How do wages compare?

Among those who died of overdose in 2024, the 2023 median annual wage was \$18,722. This is slightly higher than the 2023 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for a single income¹. The VDOL information below is specific to the person who died and does not take into account the income of others within their household. Therefore, comparisons to FPL guidelines may be off due to additional household income and the number of people in the person's household.

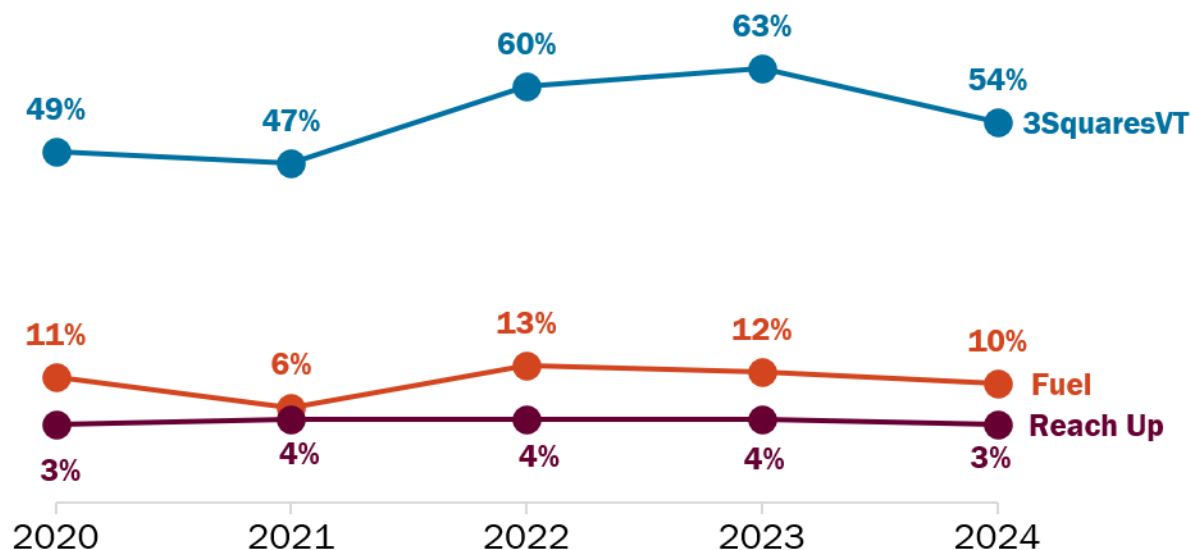
The annual median wage among those who died of an overdose in 2024 was about half that of Vermont workers overall.



Use of Financial Assistance

The Economic Services Division (ESD) of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) provides financial assistance to families and people in need. This brief focuses on enrollment in three ESD programs in the year of the person's death: 3SquaresVT (supplemental nutrition assistance program offered to low-income Vermonters), fuel assistance (helps pay heating bills for low-income Vermonters who rent or own a home), and Reach Up (case management and financial support for low-income families). ESD also offers a service for burial payment assistance after their death.

Since 2020, about half of people who died of an overdose were enrolled in **3SquaresVT** in the year of their death. About one in 10 were enrolled in **fuel assistance**, and about 3% were enrolled in **Reach Up**.



Nearly two in five Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 received payment assistance for their burials.



Employment and receipt of financial assistance are important social and economic circumstances that shape overdose risk. Understanding how these social determinants of health impacted the lives of those who died of an overdose informs prevention and planning efforts.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to our data partners at the Vermont Department of Labor and the Economic Services Division of the Vermont Department for Children & Families. At the Department of Labor, we would like to thank Commissioner Kendal Smith, Mathew Barewicz and Ben Kidder. At the Department for Children and Families, we would like to thank Commissioner Sandi Hoffman, Deputy Commissioner Miranda Gray and Brianne Renadette.

References

- 1 [HHS Poverty Guidelines and Federal Register References](#)