



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services

---

Scott Walker, Governor  
Kitty Rhoades, Secretary

**For Immediate Release**  
September 10, 2015

Contact: Jennifer Miller  
(608) 266-1683

## **Drug Overdoses Are a Leading Cause of Injury Deaths in Wisconsin**

*Health officials cite opioid pain relievers and heroin as key contributors*

MADISON – More Wisconsin residents died in 2013 as a result of drug overdose than from motor vehicle crashes, suicide, breast cancer, colon cancer, firearms, influenza, or HIV, according to a [special report](#) released today by the Department of Health Services. [Opioid](#) pain relievers, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone, contributed to 45 percent of the 843 drug overdose deaths in 2013, while heroin contributed to 27 percent. Drug overdose deaths in Wisconsin doubled from 2004 to 2013.

“From urban areas to rural communities, drug overdoses are a public health crisis,” said DHS Secretary Kitty Rhoades. “DHS is focusing our efforts on reducing inappropriate use of prescription pain relievers, as well as providing resources for recovery from the addictions that can lead to overdoses.”

Other key report findings:

- Drugs and medications – prescription drugs, illicit drugs and over-the-counter medication – were the underlying cause of death for 97 percent of all Wisconsin poisoning deaths. Of these deaths, 14 percent were suicides.
- On average, people who died as a result of drug overdose were in their early 40s.
- Drug overdose death rates were 59 percent higher among males than females.

DHS is expanding its opioid abuse prevention and [treatment](#) efforts. Recently awarded federal grants and state dollars provide funding for these new programs in Wisconsin:

- A \$3.8 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) focuses on enhancing the existing prescription drug monitoring program, improving opioid prescribing practices, expanding prevention efforts at the state and community levels, and developing innovative “rapid response projects” to address emerging problems related to prescription drug overdose.
- An \$8 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) focuses on reducing inappropriate access to prescription pain relievers to prevent misuse and abuse among persons aged 12-25 in 12 Wisconsin counties.
- A \$3 million grant from SAMHSA enables the expansion of medication-assisted treatment options in Sauk and Columbia counties, with possible expansion to Richland County. Additionally, DHS and the Great Lakes Addiction Technology Transfer Center are hosting training sessions for counselors and physicians to increase access to and retention in medication-assisted treatment statewide.
- Earlier this year, DHS awarded grants to three organizations to provide opioid treatment services in underserved areas of northern Wisconsin. Funding for this effort was included in the HOPE (Heroin and Opiate Prevention and Education) legislative package signed into law in 2014.

[More on the Wisconsin Injury and Violence Prevention Program](#)

###