

Ohioans have lost more than 1 million years of life due to drug overdose since 2009

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The drug addiction epidemic continues to plague the country, and thousands of lives are cut short each year due to overdose. Tragically, when a person's life ends prematurely, much of their potential impact on the world is lost as well. This includes both lost benefits to society and lost experiences for family and friends left behind.

To illustrate this point, a new study from Ohio University shows that more than 1 million years of life were lost in Ohio from overdose deaths between Jan. 1, 2009 and Dec. 31, 2018.

The Ohio Alliance for Innovation in Population Health (The Alliance)—a collaborative initiative formed by Ohio University's College of Health Sciences and Professions (CHSP), other higher education partners, health systems, insurers, policy groups and [population health](#) advocates—recently reviewed overdose death data for the state of Ohio, including preliminary data for 2018, to determine the extent that overdose deaths contributed to premature mortality.

Data from the Ohio Department of Health's Death Certificate file was analyzed and the years of life lost (YLL) calculation was made by subtracting the age of [death](#) from the expected lifespan based on data from the Social Security Administration.

In 2009, 1,389 people died of overdose in Ohio. This number increased by approximately 200 per year before growing by around 400 in 2014, 500 in 2015 and then 1,000 in both 2016 and 2017 where it peaked at

4,817.

In total, 26,375 Ohioans died of overdose between 2009-2018; while these individuals lived a total of 1,090,964 years, they also experienced a combined 1,028,005 years of life lost—essentially cutting their lives in half.

"The Alliance's newest study of years of life lost in Ohio reveals that the average lifespan of our state has been reduced by 0.78 years as a result of drug overdose," said Rick Hodges, director of The Alliance. "In 2017 alone, the average lifespan in Ohio dropped by 1.28 years due to overdose deaths."

Dr. Andrew Kolodny, co-director of the Opioid Policy Research Collaborative at Brandeis University, said The Alliance's study is unique because of its accurate and relatable depiction of how families are directly impacted when a friend or loved one's life is cut short due to drug overdose.

"Years of life lost captures the experience of people who have lost loved ones better than counting the number of deaths," Kolodny said. "It's the years that they won't get to experience birthdays or the years that they won't see their loved ones grow and mature. This staggering figure of a million years of life lost reflects the many young people who have died and it's hard to really conceive how much pain and suffering that figure represents."

Scott Weidle, of Germantown, Ohio, knows this pain all too well. His son, Daniel, died in 2015 after suffering from addiction, joining Weidle's stepson, nephew and brother—all of whom died of opioid overdose between 2005 and 2018.

Weidle then created danielsstory.org, and his efforts have been focused

on prescription opioid reform and increased care for persons struggling with addiction. In 2018, Daniel's Law was signed in Ohio, permitting pharmacists to administer Vivitrol to prevent the effect of opioids on the body.

"(Daniel) left behind three children, who will go on to live without their father for the rest of their lives," Weidle said. "More than all of the years of life lost, I find it most troubling to reflect on who is missing out on those years of life; the children, the families and the friends."

Germantown is located in Montgomery County, which has one of the highest YLL in the study both by population per 100,000 and total.

The Alliance's study indicates:

- Cuyahoga County accounts for the highest total of YLL with 112,464. Franklin County lost 100,683 years of life and Hamilton County was followed closely by Montgomery County at 89,501 YLL and 88,869 YLL, respectively. In Southern Ohio, Ross County suffered nearly 10,000 YLL and in Northwest Ohio, Lucas County lost 37,482 years of life.
- Based on a population per 100,000, Southern Ohio and Southwest Ohio were hit hardest as 12 counties in those areas had more than 11,000 years of life lost, ranging from Hamilton (11,155) to Montgomery (16,606). The remaining counties include: Adams, Pike, Fayette, Ross, Clinton, Clark, Clermont, Scioto, Butler and Brown. In Central Ohio, Marion County had 11,469 YLL and in Northeast Ohio, Trumbull County had 12,508 YLL.

The study includes additional data sets that focus on region, drug type, age, gender and race for the periods between 2009 and 2018.

"The report that over a million years of life was lost due to drug overdose in Ohio over the past decade is sobering. We need to appreciate that each year of life lost is a year that a family is missing a loved one, and our state is missing someone who didn't have the opportunity to reach their maximum potential," said Mark Hurst, medical director for the Ohio Department of Health. "At the same time, we need to emphasize that overdose deaths in Ohio have dropped recently and more people than ever are receiving effective treatment. People do recover from addiction, and we should never lose that hope and perspective."

According to Orman Hall, an executive in residence for CHSP and the study's author, Ohio's drug overdose deaths began increasing well before the years covered in this research.

"We estimate there would have been less than 20,000 years of life lost on average annually in the mid-1990s," Hall said. "In 2017, there were more than 188,000 years of life lost. That's a 900 percent increase."

Kolodny said Ohio is one of the states hardest hit in the country by the overdose and addiction epidemic. However, he said there could be positive news on the horizon, as early 2018 statistics are currently projecting a nationwide drop in opioid-related overdose deaths for the first time in 25 years.

The Alliance's study also shows a decrease in overdose deaths in 2018 (3,609) compared to 2017 (4,817). Such a projected decrease would represent 47,613 less years of [life](#) lost between the past two years.

"I don't know if that (YLL) decrease will be as dramatic nationally, but there is evidence that Ohio may be bending the curve," said Kolodny. "It looks like there was a real drop in 2018, we don't know if the trend continues in 2019, but there is some light at the end of the tunnel."

Kolodny cautioned that even with the potential decrease in overdose deaths in 2018, record numbers of overdose deaths still occur in Ohio and across the United States.

According to Kolodny, the strategies for bringing the opioid addiction epidemic to an end are not necessarily the strategies that will reduce overdose deaths in the short term because the incidence rate of opioid use disorder needs to be reduced first. He said more cautious prescribing practices are needed to prevent new cases. To reduce [overdose deaths](#), he said the most effective strategy involves making effective treatment more easily available.

"The Alliance's research paints a sobering picture of the real-world impact of our state's drug epidemic. Not only have families lost their sons, daughters, siblings, relatives and friends, they've also lost all that they could have been had their lives not been cut short by overdose," said CHSP Dean Randy Leite. "CHSP will continue to work to address the needs of our communities and to find innovative ways to assess and address the public health needs of our society. Combatting Ohio's drug [overdose](#) epidemic will continue to be an important focus of our collective efforts."

More information: docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/89e8f1_aed077a0627237f2.pdf

Provided by Ohio University

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