

# Alarming increase in Illinois fatal drug overdoses among Black and older adults

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Today, on International Overdose Awareness Day, Northwestern University scientists [have launched a public dashboard](#) containing the most comprehensive data on unintentional fatal drug overdoses in

Illinois.

The goal of the dashboard is to inform public health efforts to address the ever-increasing rate of overdose-related deaths in the state.

"The dashboard allows local areas and counties to explore in detail their own issues with drug overdose [death](#), and hopefully some ideas of how to address it," said Maryann Mason, associate professor of emergency medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and the lead faculty member behind the new dashboard.

Some of the more alarming trends the dashboard has captured include:

- Year over year, overdose deaths are increasing with "no end in sight," Mason said. She calls the dashboard "a call for all hands on deck."
- An alarming increase in [older adults](#) (55–64 years old): 473 deaths in 2019 vs. 729 in 2021—about 80% are opioid related but there's an increasing load of cocaine-involved deaths. The number of cases with cocaine as a cause of death has gone from 832 in 2019 to 1,167 in 2021 in Illinois counties with 30 or more annual drug overdose deaths.
- An alarming increase in non-Hispanic Black adults: 357 deaths in 2019 vs. 610 in 2021—a doubling compared to white adults (347 deaths in 2019 vs. 426 in 2021). One reason could be a shift from harder-to-obtain prescription opioids to easier-to-get [illicit drugs](#), Mason said.
- A [dramatic change](#) over time in toxicology: Heroin has dropped significantly; fentanyl is up and has climbed significantly over time; cocaine is up; xylazine is up. "The dashboard gives a 10,000-foot view of how the illicit drug market has changed in Illinois," Mason said.

The [CDC offers a similar dashboard nationally](#), but this [dashboard](#) includes much more detailed information, said Mason, who also is a public health sociologist and an expert in violence and injury research with a focus on substance use.

Provided by Northwestern University

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