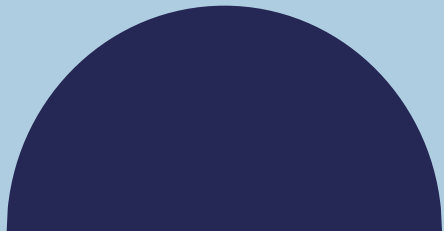


Addressing Loss: A Unique Partnership to Support Loved Ones Affected by Overdose

Melanie Gibboney, MPH, and Jacob White, PhD, Hamilton County, Ohio, Public Health

Peggy Schneider, Hamilton County Heroin Task Force



Site Information

- **County:** Hamilton County (HC)
- **City, state:** Cincinnati, Ohio (OH)
- **Year OFR started:** 2016
- **Estimated number of overdose deaths per year:** ~380
- **Size of jurisdiction:** 830,000 county residents and 49 political jurisdictions
- **Funding sources:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the history and structure of the addiction response in Hamilton County.
2. Explore the unique relationship between Hamilton County Public Health and the Heroin Task Force.
3. Analyze 2024 data and outcomes from the investigative liaison role.



AGENDA



Welcome



Hamilton County Public Health (HCPH)
Overdose Fatality Review



Hamilton County Heroin Task Force and
Ohio University (OU) Evaluation Team



Collaboration, Successes, and Lessons Learned



Questions and Discussion

INTRODUCTIONS

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**HAMILTON COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH**

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OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEW (OFR)

Reduce the number of overdose fatalities and create recommendations to identify circumstances surrounding the deaths to inform prevention

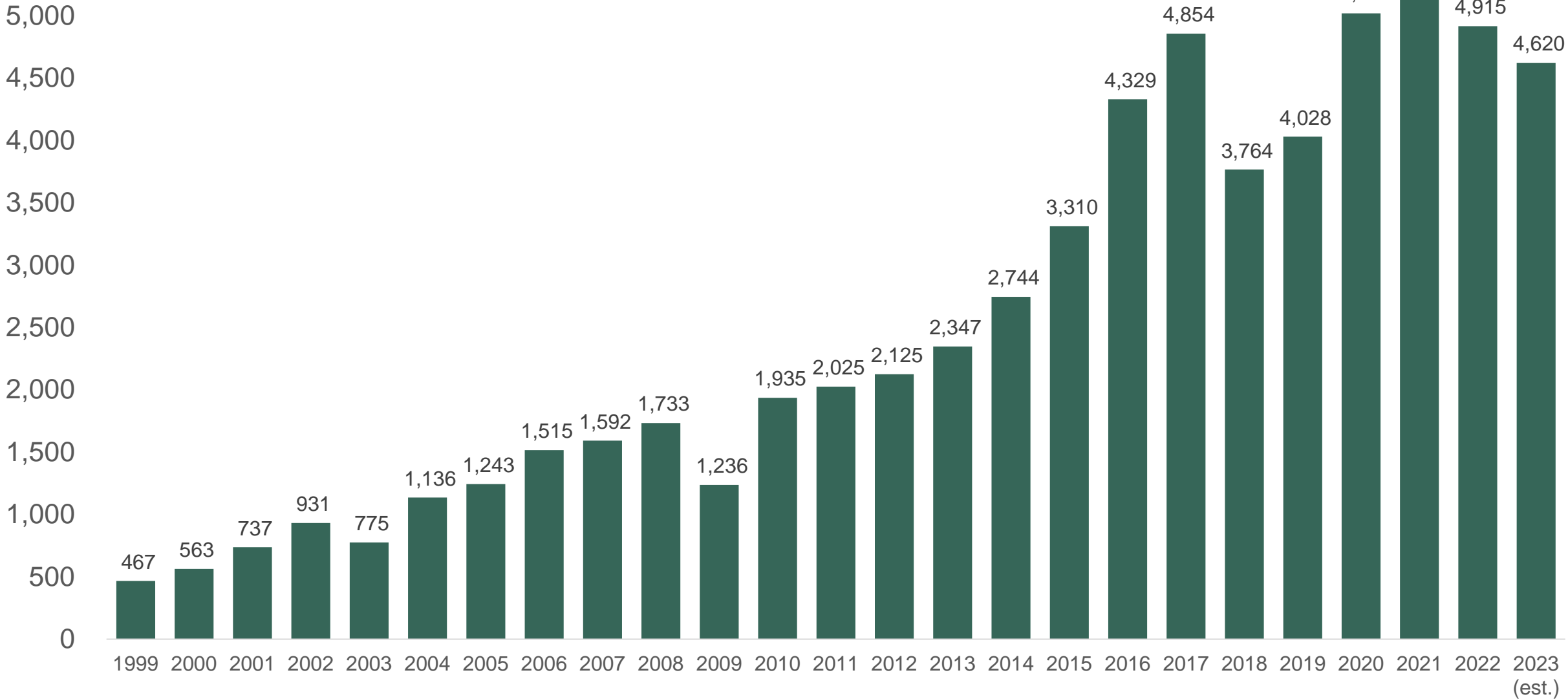


Started in 2016; meet monthly to review data from all confirmed unintentional overdose deaths of Hamilton County residents

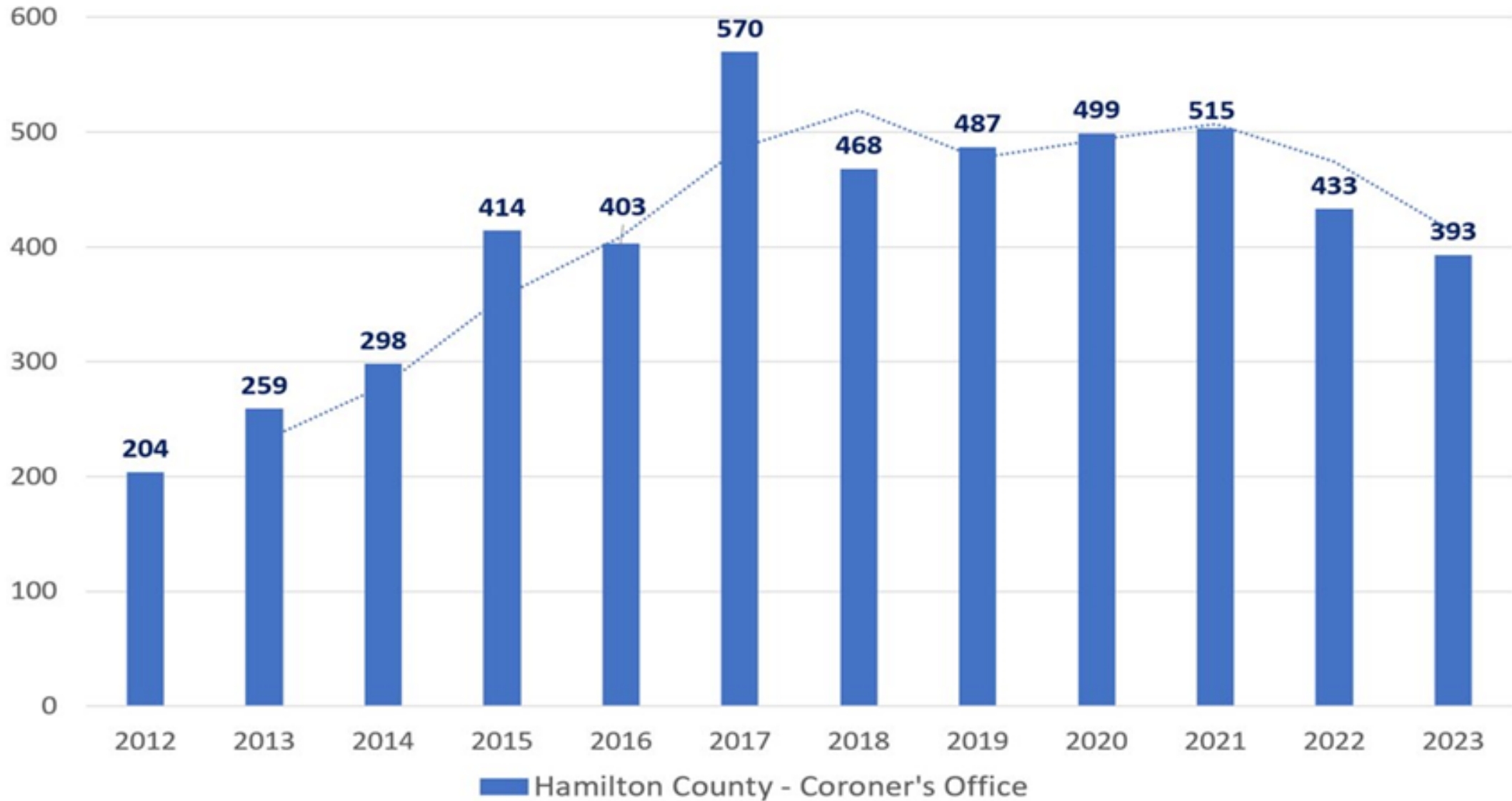


- Coroner's office
- Fire/emergency medical services
- Physicians
- Prescribers
- Law enforcement
- Job and family services
- Recovery services
- Other public entities

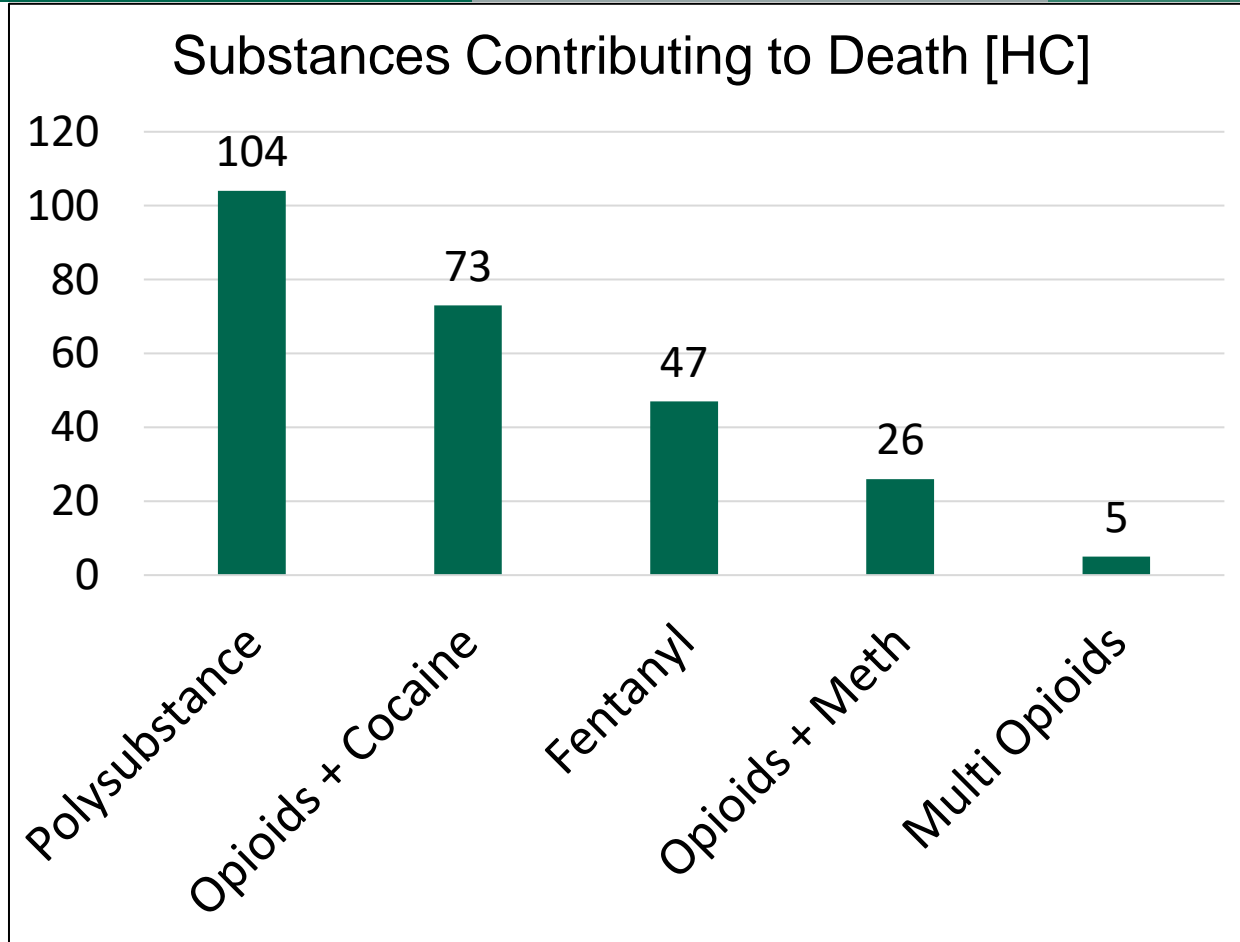
Ohio Overdose Deaths, 1999–2023



HAMILTON COUNTY OVERDOSE DATA: 2012-2023



HAMILTON COUNTY OVERDOSE DATA (May 2023 – June 2024)



Total Overdoses: **360**

Polysubstance Breakdown:

- Fentanyl - 95
- Cocaine - 85
- Methamphetamine - 42
- Alcohol - 28
- Benzodiazepines - 20

Count of Substances Overall:

- Fentanyl - 287
- Cocaine - 195
- *Xylazine - 91
- Methamphetamine - 84
- Alcohol - 47
- Benzodiazepines - 26

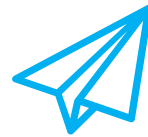
OFR DATA PROCESS



Data from Ohio Department of Health confirmed unintentional overdose fatalities



Scan data and select cases based on trends and themes



Send to partner agencies for more information



Summarize and present findings



Recommendations!

OFR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Address common barriers, including criminal and/or health history, stable work and/or housing, income, and transportation were identified in many cases as barriers**
- 2. Improve access to and diversity of substance use disorder treatment options**
- 3. Continue efforts to reduce stigma in the community**
- 4. Increased support for family and friends who have lost a loved one to an overdose**

**HAMILTON COUNTY
HEROIN TASK FORCE**





MISSION

Multi-teared approach to the problem geared toward reducing the number of opiate-related deaths, holding drug dealers responsible for their crimes, providing access to treatment, and reducing recidivism



- **IN 2014, HAMILTON COUNTY HAD 298 OVERDOSE-RELATED DEATHS, COMPARED TO 87 HOMICIDES**

- Extensive law enforcement resources were dedicated to homicide investigations
- There were no dedicated law enforcement resources to address the crisis and the loss of life to heroin/opioid overdoses



FORMATION OF TASK FORCE

- 1 May 2015, task force officers (TFOs) begin training
- 2 June 1, 2015, TFOs begin investigating fatal and non-fatal overdoses
- 3 1,800+ cases since inception

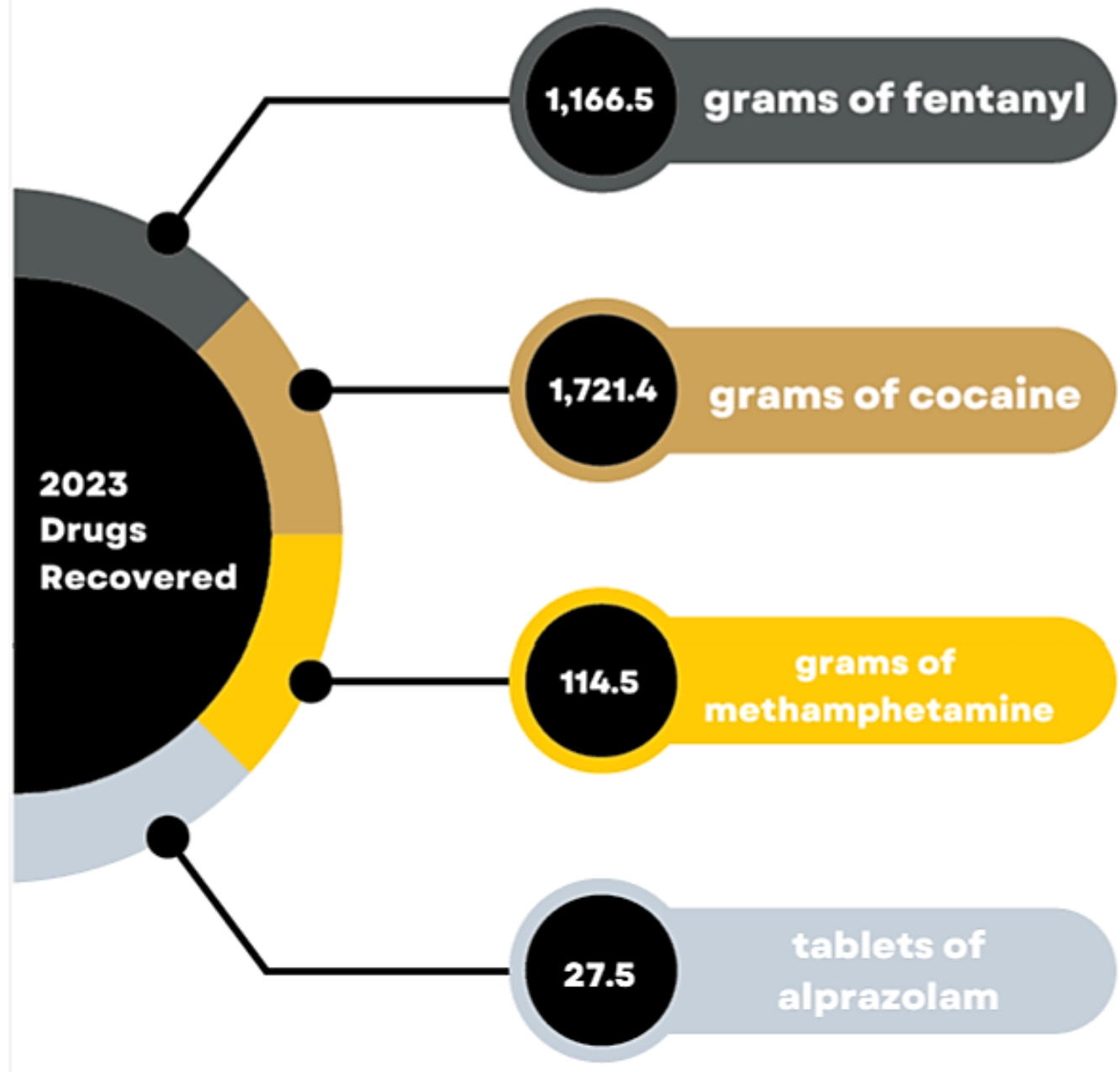


CHANGING MINDSETS

- Shifting sentiment to treat people overdosing as victims
- Increasing number of overdoses putting strain on emergency medical and police resources
- Holding dealers accountable for the deaths they directly cause



**201 cases
initiated
in 2023**



Source: Hamilton County Addiction Response Coalition, State of the Addiction Crisis 2023 Annual Report

CRIME SCENE PROCESSING

1

Each overdose is treated as a crime scene

2

Photograph each scene and collect all evidence as it pertains to a fatal overdose, including drugs, cell phones, paraphernalia, and anything else of evidentiary value

3

Submit all items to the Hamilton County Coroner's Office for drug identification and DNA, if applicable





PARTNERSHIP



OFR Heroin Task Force (HTF) Investigative Liaison

- Gathers information and assists family members in dealing with their loss while directing them to the proper continuum of care as they move forward
- Seeks to reduce the number of fatal overdoses and provide families with a level of care that they deserve!

OFR Heroin Task Force Investigative Liaison



The Hamilton County Heroin Task Force and Coroner's Office understand the weight of this experience and are here to provide support and guidance

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

ABOUT US:

Today, the Hamilton County Heroin Task Force responded to your loved one's scene.

Evidence such as drugs, drug paraphernalia, and cell phones is collected to aid in the investigation.

Grief and Bereavement Resources in Hamilton County

Coping with loss is a deeply personal and challenging journey.

We encourage you to reach out for support when needed.



NAVIGATING YOUR LOSS

A guide for families coping with the loss of a loved one due to a suspected overdose death.

The Hamilton County Heroin Task Force is here to help you understand the investigation process and connect you with resources.

UNDERSTANDING THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS

Our team is here to support you as we work to understand what led to your loved one's passing.

This investigation is a careful and methodical process, intended to uncover any details that can bring clarity and accountability.

The Task Force's mission is to identify the individual who provided the substances leading to the overdose.

This process is thorough and takes time. Evidence processing and lab results often take several months.

We appreciate your patience and understanding as we work through each step.

THE ROLE OF THE CORONER'S INVESTIGATOR

An Investigator from the Hamilton County Coroner's Office is present to observe and document the scene, gathering vital information to understand the circumstances of your loved one's passing.

After the on-scene investigation, your loved one will be transported to the Coroner's Office for an autopsy.

We encourage family to contact our office with questions, concerns, or information regarding next steps.

Final autopsy report results usually take approximately 10 weeks.

**For questions, please contact:
Hamilton County Coroner's Office
513-946-8700**

WHAT TO EXPECT & HOW YOU CAN HELP

The Heroin Task Force thoroughly investigates all drug overdose deaths. Items collected at the scene are essential to our investigation and will be retained and analyzed to support this process.

Phones and other electronic devices are held for an indeterminate period to ensure comprehensive evidence collection.

If you have information, such as phone passcodes or anything that might assist the investigation, please reach out to:

**Peggy Schneider
513-687-5213**



PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.



NEXT-OF-KIN/FRIENDS & FAMILY INTERVIEWS

Heroin Task
Force Outreach

Heroin County
Public Health
OFR
OUTREACH



HAMILTON COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH

NEXT-OF-KIN INTERVIEWER SURVEY



Includes questions about the decedent's:

- Physical and mental health history
- Family, friend, and romantic relationships
- Treatment and substance use history
- Education and work experience
- Criminal justice, court, and probation involvement
- Protective factors
- Stressors, triggers, and trauma history



**HAMILTON COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH**

WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

- Social support mitigates grief responses and supports the mourner
- People benefit from having friends, families, and communities bear witness to their suffering and loss
- Telling the story helps process emotions and integrate grief
- Helps to combat and overcome stigma that comes with a substance-involved loss



OHIO UNIVERSITY EVALUATION

- Research-practitioner partnership allows for third-party objectivity
- Flexibility is key!
- Deliverables include:
 - *Dashboard for Task Force*
 - *Interview script and analysis*
 - *Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software (Atlas.ti)*
- Exploring AI features of the QDA
- Gaining better understanding of possible intervention points

OHIO
UNIVERSITY

Voinovich School of
Leadership and Public Service



HAMILTON COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH

IMPROVEMENTS MADE



- Obtained recording and transcription services for more comprehensive data collection
- Began translating all outreach materials and advertising translation services for interviews
- Updated interviewer survey questions, script, and methodology
- Upgraded data collection system
- **Implemented an overdose loss-specific support group in the community in collaboration with Hospice of Cincinnati!**

LESSONS LEARNED: AFTER AN OVERDOSE LOSS

- Acknowledge the reality of the circumstances of the death
- Do not define your loved one by their addiction
- Learn about addiction. Understanding the struggle your loved one had may decrease feelings of guilt rather than having them spiral into unhealthy and untruthful proportions
- Find healthy ways of acknowledging, validating, and expressing your feelings
- Research what specific resources are available in the area for an overdose or addiction loss
- Seek professional help from a therapist or your doctor for reactions that persist and may interfere with functioning

LINK TO RESOURCES AFTER AN OVERDOSE LOSS

- Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing (GRASP)
- Compassionate Friends
- Companions on a Journey Grief Support
- Learn to Cope
- Parents of Addicted Loved Ones (PAL)
- Goldstein Family Grief Center
- Fernside Center for Grieving Children
- Hospice of Cincinnati
- Crossroads Hospice



REMINDER: CARE FOR YOURSELF

- Acknowledge impact of work on well-being
 - Avoid numbing emotions
- Take care of your body
 - Sleep, exercise, hydration (we hold trauma in our bodies)
- Reach out to coworkers/leaders for support
 - It helps to talk to someone who gets it
- Incorporate rituals of remembrance/honor those who have died



IN SUMMARY

1. Collaborative partnerships between public health and public safety are critical to achieve results.
2. There are practical steps for establishing agreements and partnerships across agencies.
3. Pairing family interviews and OFRs creates targeted, evidence-based interventions.
4. Conducting sensitive interviews helps support families impacted by addiction.