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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Winnebago County Overdose Fatality Review Annual Report Released** *Historic High Number of Overdose Deaths Affecting Younger People*

**OSHKOSH, Wis. (June 5, 2024)** - The Winnebago County Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) team has released its 2023-2024 Annual Report summarizing local fatal overdose data, themes, and recommendations for preventing overdose deaths in Winnebago County.

The OFR team started in 2018 and consists of 47 partners representing 35 local organizations, all working together to create change in our community and save lives. The OFR team meets monthly to review cases of people who lost their lives to an overdose. The review process involves sharing information about the individual's life and death including risk factors and circumstances surrounding the person, examination of system issues related to addiction and substance use, and identification of opportunities to influence policy and practice to prevent future overdoses and overdose deaths.



In 2023, 47 overdose deaths were confirmed by the Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office. The majority of the deaths occurred among individuals aged 18 to 44, which is younger than previous years. Fentanyl remains the primary cause of death, with 31 of the 47 deaths listing fentanyl as the primary cause. The OFR team identified the following major themes:

- Minors left behind due to overdose death lack support and access to vital services for children and families who experience trauma.
- Most victims who died of an overdose had a history of mental health disorders and did not receive the treatment services needed.
- There remain gaps in access to treatment and the overall continuum of care for those struggling with substance use disorders.
- Many victims felt isolated and had little to no support. Affinity groups and/or peer support can help foster relationships and build support to reduce the recurrence of use and bolster recovery.

"While our county has experienced a record-high number of overdose deaths, our team is more dedicated than ever to solving the problem. In working together, we can create changes in programming, systems, and our community to save lives," said Jennifer Skolaski, program manager of the Winnebago County OFR team. "The number of overdose deaths is only one metric. Our team continues to focus on the prevention work we've done to connect people to help no matter where they are on the journey to recovery."

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The team has voted on and implemented 54 recommendations and 11 projects to prevent future overdose deaths in the past six years. Based on cases reviewed and data trends, the OFR team will continue to focus on the following priorities for 2024-2025:

- Close gaps in communication between systems to strengthen the continuum of care.
- Identify children falling between gaps and connect them with care.
- Focus on preventative efforts.

"I very much appreciate the great work OFR partners are doing to prevent overdose deaths, connect people to treatment and recovery, and break the cycles of addiction," said County Executive Jon Doemel. "My goals are to find ways to prevent substance use in the first place, reduce harm where we can to keep people alive long enough to get to recovery, and increase community support and involvement to come together to turn the tide of this tragic epidemic."

The report outlines ways to get involved, help, and support the team's work. These include connecting to the We Heart You app at [www.weheartyou.org/app](http://www.weheartyou.org/app), picking up free Narcan at Winnebago County Public Health, connecting those in need to the Solutions Peer Response Team at 1-866-465-0010, and volunteering with Breakwater at [www.breakwaterwi.org](http://www.breakwaterwi.org) to help prevent and reduce youth substance use in Winnebago County.

For more information on the Winnebago County OFR Team or to read the full Annual Report, visit [www.winnebagocountywi.gov/health](http://www.winnebagocountywi.gov/health) or call 920-232-3000.

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Direct link to the 2023-2024 Overdose Fatality Review Annual Report: [wchd.pub/2023ofrannualreport](http://wchd.pub/2023ofrannualreport)