

# OVERDOSE DEATHS ARE PREVENTABLE

WINNEBAGO COUNTY  
OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEW  
2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



## SUSTAINING PROGRESS: STRENGTHENING OUR FIGHT AGAINST OVERDOSES

The progress we've made in reducing overdose deaths in Winnebago County is encouraging, but **our work is far from over**. As nonfatal overdoses persist, younger populations are increasingly impacted, and drug trends grow more complex. The Winnebago County Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) team stands committed to ensuring this decline continues—not just as a statistic, but as a reflection of lives saved and futures restored. Every conversation, intervention, and act of support matters.

This report highlights why we do this work, the progress we've made, and the challenges that still lie ahead. The OFR team—made up of 47 partners across 35 agencies—meets monthly to review overdose cases through a confidential but structured process. While individual cases remain private, the overall review process is transparent and focused on identifying gaps and improving our collective response to substance use and overdose.

We remember those we've lost and reaffirm our commitment to those still struggling. **Our strength lies in our unity, our compassion, and our unwavering dedication to a future where fewer families experience this loss.** Together, we can continue this fight, save lives, and bring hope to our community.

#weheartyourecovery

## 2025 - 2026 PRIORITIES

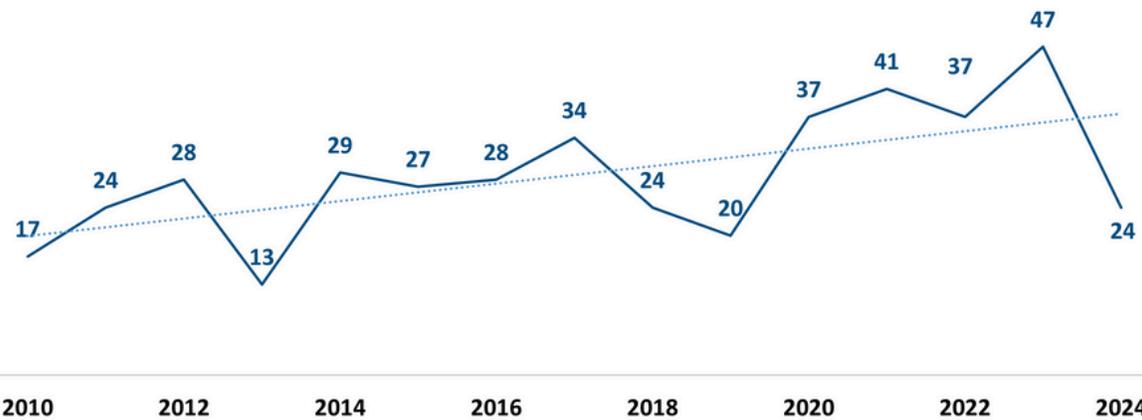
Each year, the Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) team carefully reviews local case data and trends to identify and vote on priority areas that will guide their work. For 2025-2026, the team will continue focusing on three key priorities.

**1. Close gaps in communication between systems to strengthen continuum of care.** Too many individuals are still falling through the cracks, and it is crucial to prioritize the establishment of effective communication channels and build a seamless continuum of care across all systems.

**2. Identify children falling between gaps and connect them to support.** Minors impacted by a loved one's overdose are not consistently receiving the help they need. This lack of support and access to services exacerbates their trauma and long-term outcomes.

**3. Focus on overdose preventive efforts (i.e., trauma, early substance use).** To save lives, we must prioritize prevention—addressing trauma, early substance use, and reaching those at risk, including children, individuals who have survived nonfatal overdoses, and grieving family and friends. Through deeper collaboration with substance use organizations, we can expand efforts to prevent addiction and support healing across our community.

In 2024, there were 24 overdose deaths in Winnebago County, a 49% decrease compared to 2023.



The dotted line above represents the trend line of overdose deaths over the years, showing the overall direction and long-term pattern in the data, even as individual yearly numbers may rise or fall.

# 2024 Fatal Overdose Data from Winnebago County

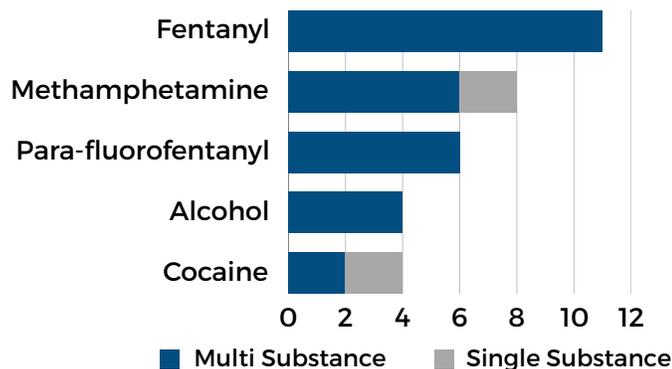
This page represents confirmed data for 2024 overdose deaths in the county as shared by the Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office.

✔ **Sex/Gender\***: 7 victims were listed as Female, 17 victims were listed as Male

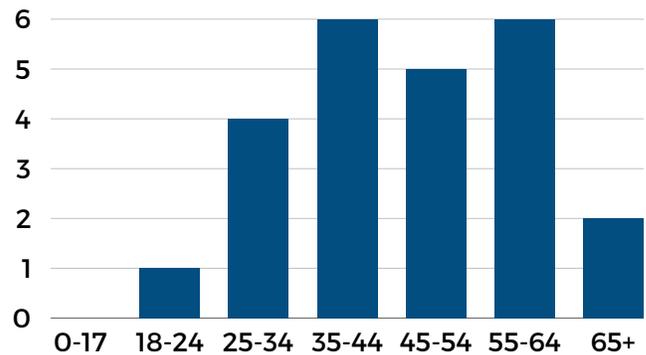
✔ **Race/Ethnicity\***: 21 victims were listed as White; 3 victims were listed as Black

\*Sex, race & ethnicity were often determined based on identifiers listed on government documents, such as a driver's license. The identifiers listed were not necessarily chosen by the victims. If death records provided information that a victim identified as transgender, they were included in the sex/gender category that they identified as.

In 2024, Fentanyl was listed as a primary cause of death in 11 overdose deaths in Winnebago County.



In 2024, the majority of overdose deaths in Winnebago County occurred among individuals aged 35-64.



In 2024, Winnebago County had an overdose death rate of 1.4 per 10,000 people. City of Oshkosh and City of Neenah had death rates that were higher than the county total.

	Number of overdose deaths	Death rate per 10,000 population	Population (2020 Census)
City of Oshkosh	14	2.1	66,816
City of Neenah	5	1.8	27,319
Towns & Villages	3	0.5	60,893
Cities of Menasha & Appleton	1	0.6	16,702
<b>Winnebago County Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>171,730</b>

Rate is calculated as the number of overdose deaths in a specific geographic area divided by the population count and multiplied by 10,000. This allows for comparison across geographies with different population sizes.

Of the 24 overdose deaths in 2024, 22 individuals had a known history of substance use—including illicit substances, marijuana, alcohol use disorder, and/or misuse of prescription medications. Additionally, 15 individuals had a previously diagnosed mental health condition, such as generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or bipolar disorder. This data is consistent with trends observed in previous years.

# Priorities and Themes

## Major Themes from Deaths Reviewed

The OFR team meets monthly to review cases of people who have lost their lives to an overdose. After reviewing decedent cases from 2024-25, several recurring themes were identified:

- **Mental Health Linked to Most 2024 Overdose Deaths.** Most victims who died of overdose had a documented history of mental health disorders. Of the 24 overdose deaths in 2024, 15 of the victims had a previous mental health diagnosis (general anxiety, PTSD, Bipolar disorder, etc.). This data aligns with what we have seen in previous years.
- **Youth Impacted by Overdose Loss Face Ongoing Trauma.** Children who lose parents to overdose deaths continue to face disproportionate challenges. The effects of this trauma are compounded by limited access to essential support systems and services. There is a pressing need to improve our understanding of how to effectively address trauma, while also expanding mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment options tailored for adolescents.
- **Nonfatal Overdoses in EDs Often Tied to Mental Health Struggles.** A significant number of nonfatal overdoses treated in emergency departments involve individuals struggling with mental health challenges. Some intentionally misuse prescription or over-the-counter medications, or use illicit substances, as a form of self-harm. Others misuse these substances not with the intent to end their lives, but as a means to sleep or temporarily escape emotional and psychological distress.
- **Gaps in Treatment Access Undermine Overdose Prevention.** Many overdose deaths reveal critical gaps between treatment services, mental health care, primary care, and other essential support systems. It is vital for our community to remain committed to enhancing the continuum of care and to supporting all models of evidence-based treatment and recovery.
- **Isolation Increases Overdose Risk—Support Networks Are Key.** Many individuals who experienced an overdose reported feeling isolated and lacking meaningful support. Certain populations, including LGBTQQIA individuals and people of color, are disproportionately affected. Creating affinity groups and expanding peer support networks can help strengthen social connections, reduce the risk of recurrence, and support sustained recovery.



## 2024 - 2025 Recommendations

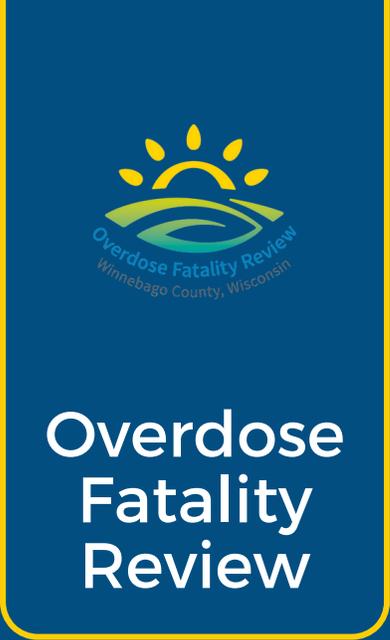
Based on OFR data, the team developed and approved the following recommendations this past year:

- Provide OFR partners with education on statutes and laws that govern adolescent consent to Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder treatment, parental abilities and restrictions regarding consent to treatment, and the ability to view medical records.
- Create a simple tool to help people navigate substance use disorder treatment and resources in Winnebago County.
- Strengthen relationships between OFR and Breakwater to explore greater prevention opportunities for youth.
- Offer community training on the interconnectedness between brain injuries and Substance Use Disorder.
- Obtain data regarding the Good Samaritan Law and any negative consequences for people who have administered Naloxone.
- Obtain data regarding the language and cultural needs of people with substance use disorder.
- Increase community awareness that pregnancy and postpartum are high-risk times for people struggling with or at risk of substance use disorder.
- Increase community awareness about the risk factors that have led to overdose deaths in Winnebago County since 2018 to the present.

*Photos in this report were provided thanks to Mirrorless Productions, the Sparkle Studio, and Weston Imaging Group.*

# Overdose and Substance Use Prevention: Referral to Care

A key recommendation from the team is to implement projects that prevent overdoses and connect people with resources for and reduce harm associated with substance use. The ultimate goals are to increase the number of people in recovery and reduce deaths due to overdose. This has been a priority for the OFR team since 2018.



## KEY PROJECTS

### Narcan Access

### Solutions Peer Response Team

### "We Heart You" App

## DETAILS

Winnebago County Public Health provides free Narcan to people and organizations

Peer-driven with trained recovery coaches to help those struggling with addiction

Phone app to find recovery resources in three counties

## OUTCOMES

Increased access to overdose reversal medication

Increased referrals to treatment and programs; increased treatment attempts and enrollments

Increased awareness of treatment options

## OUTCOME SUMMARY

**1,164** Doses of Narcan distributed

**2,121** Downloads of the "We Heart You" app

**529** People trained on overdoses and protocols

**1,918** People served by Solutions Peer Response Team



# Childhood Trauma

A key recommendation from the OFR Team has been to implement projects that address childhood trauma as an important contributing factor to substance use disorder. The ultimate goal is to reduce youth and young adult substance use. Reducing childhood trauma has been a priority for OFR since 2020.



## Overdose Fatality Review

### KEY PROJECTS

#### Handle with Care Project

#### Drug-endangered Children Program

#### Education & training for professionals

### DETAILS

Referral from law enforcement to school when student is exposed to trauma

Identify, respond, intervene, and support children in these environments

Training on the risks for and outcomes of childhood trauma

### OUTCOMES

Increased wrap-around services for children; improved response

Increased wrap-around services for children; improved response

Increased knowledge and awareness of childhood trauma; improved response

### OUTCOME SUMMARY

2,256

Total Referrals to Handle with Care

12

Agencies coordinate on Drug Endangered Children

160+

People working on reducing childhood trauma

### LONG-TERM OUTCOMES



1 in 2 HS students report mental health problems



2 in 3 HS students report feeling like they belong at school



1 in 6 HS students report seeing violence

WI-YRBS, 2023, Winnebago County Report

# 2024 - 2025 Impact

We love highlighting the implementation of OFR recommendations and the hard work of OFR partners; all leading to fewer overdoses in our community.



## Narcan Training and OAKs in OASD

The Oshkosh Area School District (OASD) collaborated with the Clinton Foundation, Start Healing Now, Winnebago County Public Health, Song for Charlie, and Collaborative Wellness to install Overdose Aid Kits (OAKs) in all middle and high schools. You can watch the powerful recap here.



## Neenah Overdose Intervention Pilot

Neenah Police Department, Fox Crossing Police Department, Winnebago County Public Health, and Apricity have come together to launch a one-year data-driven pilot project aimed at reducing overdoses in Neenah. Motivated by high overdose rates in the city, this collaborative team meets monthly to evaluate data, share insights, and take coordinated action. The pilot emphasizes cross-agency problem-solving.



## Public Health Vending Machines

Shout out to Winnebago County Public Health (WCPH) for installing two 24/7 Public Health Vending Machines in Oshkosh and Neenah. These free outdoor machines offer access to prevention kits, including Narcan, Fentanyl test strips, gun locks, menstrual products, and more. Find them at 112 Otter Ave. (Oshkosh) and 211 N Commercial St. (Neenah). Learn more at <https://wchd.pub/PHVM> or call 920-232-3000.



## WE ❤️ YOU Community Award of Excellence

This award honors organizations that go above and beyond to improve access to substance use and mental health resources. This year's recipients, WCPH and the Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office, have demonstrated exceptional leadership, compassion, and innovation. From leading life-saving initiatives like free Narcan distribution and overdose spike alerts to offering critical support for families affected by overdose, these teams have shown a commitment to community well-being. Their work is a powerful example of how collaboration and care can save lives and build stronger, healthier communities.



## TEDx Oshkosh

OFR Project Manager Jennifer Skolaski spoke at the 2024 event to share the powerful story of the OFR team's work through, "An Antidote to an Overdose Stigma: We Heart You." She highlighted the importance of community in preventing overdose deaths and breaking down stigma. You can watch her talk here.



# How to Help



In the face of the overdose crisis, it's easy to feel powerless but remember, each of us holds the potential to spark change. By embracing the "We Heart You" approach, we can offer hope and take action to prevent overdose deaths. Every conversation we start, every hand we extend, and every resource we share can save lives and heal communities. Let's come together with compassion and determination, because your involvement means a brighter, safer future for all. Together, we heart you, we hear you, and we can make a difference.



## Connect

Know someone struggling? Reach out to the Solutions Peer Response Team—real people who've been there. Download the We Heart You App or call 1-866-465-0010 to **talk to someone who understands.**



## Volunteer

**Be a force of hope.** Offer your time and energy at local recovery organizations or events:

- Rethink Addiction Run/Walk – Sept 25, 2025 in Oshkosh [solutionsrecovery.org/recovery-fest-2/](https://solutionsrecovery.org/recovery-fest-2/)
- Breakwater – Help prevent youth substance use in Winnebago County, [breakwaterwi.org](https://breakwaterwi.org)



## Share & Support

- Join the movement. Follow and share the [We Heart You Recovery Facebook page](#). Show up for others.
- Donate. Support life-saving services at places like Apricity, Collaborative Wellness, Nova Counseling, Solutions Recovery, or Unity Recovery Services.
- Share one of the many resources from the We Heart You App and connect someone to help!

**Hope is contagious!**

Thank you to all of our incredible OFR partners for your continued dedication and collaboration. Your commitment to addressing the root causes of overdose deaths is making a real impact. Together, we are building a stronger, safer community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. We are deeply grateful for all that you do! A special thank you to Sarahjean Schluechtermann from Winnebago County Public Health and Andrea Gromoske from Gromoske Consulting for their hard work on this report.

**Contact information:** OFR support is coordinated through the Winnebago County Health Department. For any questions, contact Jennifer Skolaski, OFR Project Manager at [jskolaski@winnebagocountywi.gov](mailto:jskolaski@winnebagocountywi.gov) or [health@winnebagocountywi.gov](mailto:health@winnebagocountywi.gov)

SCAN ME



## Winnebago County OFR Partners

- Addiction Medical Solutions of Wisconsin Oshkosh
- Apricity
- Ascension
- Aurora Medical Center of Oshkosh
- Breakwater
- City of Appleton Health Department
- City of Menasha Health Department
- City of Menasha Police Department
- City of Oshkosh Fire Department/ Emergency Medical Services
- City of Oshkosh Police Department
- Community Church Oshkosh
- Day by Day Warming Shelter
- Department of Justice
- Fox Crossing Police Department
- Gold Cross Ambulance Service
- Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
- Lake Winnebago Area Metropolitan Enforcement Group
- Neenah Police Department
- N.E.W. Mental Health Connection
- Omro Police Department
- Oshkosh Area School District
- Shaffer Counseling & Consulting, LLC, part of Collaborative Wellness
- Solutions Recovery, Inc.
- ThedaCare, Inc.
- Unity Recovery Services
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Police Department
- Village of Winneconne Police Department
- Winnebago County Public Health
- Winnebago County Human Services
- Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office
- Winnebago County District Attorney
- Winnebago County Sheriff's Office
- Winnebago County Sheriff's Office - Jail
- Wisconsin Department of Corrections