



August 2020 Report: Rhode Island Review of Overdose Accidental Deaths (ROAD) Team

The ROAD Team at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) convened in August 2020 to conduct an overdose death review and examine the circumstances surrounding fatal drug overdoses occurring in the state. Based on the present findings, the ROAD Team recommends several community and structural initiatives that can be implemented by state and local partners to prevent the incidence of drug overdose.

Note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data analyses from the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS) were temporarily unavailable. The August 2020 Report primarily utilizes data from the Office of the State Medical Examiners (OSME) as well as other sources.

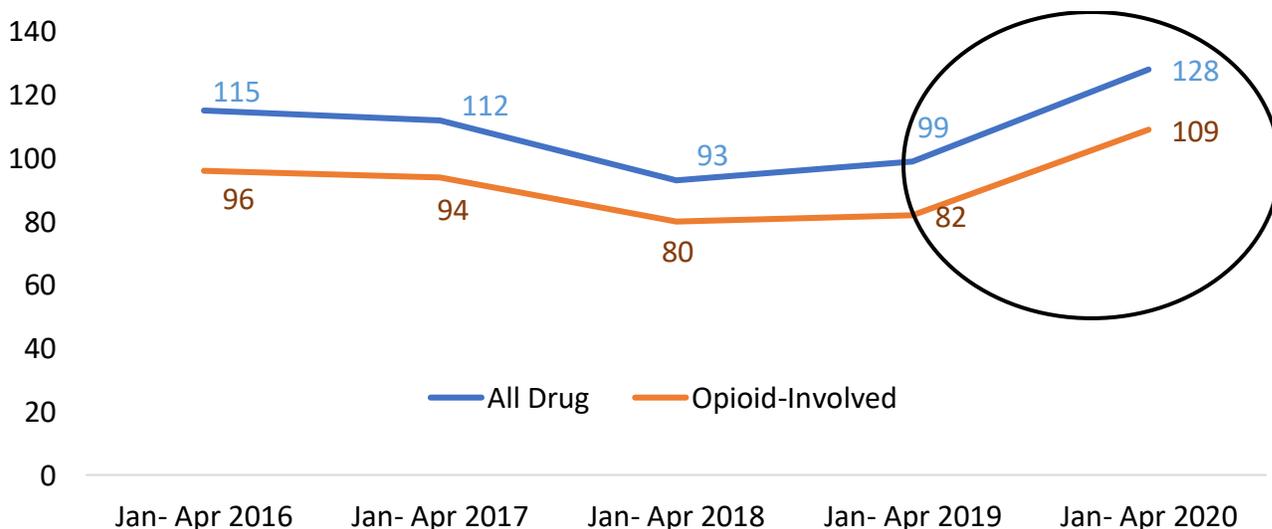
August 2020 Focus

- Data compared accidental drug overdose deaths that occurred in Rhode Island from January 2020 to April 2020 and January 2019 to April 2019.
- Case reviews focused on 12 individuals who died of an accidental drug overdose in March 2020 or April 2020. These individuals had a history of a substance use disorder, mental illness, and/or substance use treatment.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on individuals with a history of a substance use disorder, mental illness, and/or substance use treatment were considered.

Data Trends

- Non-fatal and fatal drug overdoses have increased throughout the US in 2020.^{1,2}
- From 2016 to 2019, accidental drug overdose deaths occurring in Rhode Island decreased by 8%.
- In alignment with recent national trends, Rhode Island has experienced an increase in drug overdose deaths in 2020. This increase in overdose deaths is likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- From January 2020 to April 2020, accidental drug overdose deaths from *all drugs* (i.e., any drug contributing to the cause of death) increased by 29% compared to the same time period in 2019.
- From January 2020 to April 2020, accidental drug overdose deaths where *any opioid* contributed to the death increased by 33% compared to the same time period in 2019.

Figure 1. *Accidental Drug Overdose Deaths Occurring in Rhode Island: Comparison of January 2020-April 2020 and January 2019-April 2019.*



Source: Office of the State Medical Examiners (OSME). Updated July 21, 2020.

Notes: Data reflect accidental drug overdose deaths and do not include suicides, homicides, or undetermined deaths. Data reflect deaths occurring in Rhode Island and may include non-Rhode Island residents. Rhode Island residents who died outside of Rhode Island are not included in these data findings.

ROAD Team Recommendations for Community Overdose Prevention

- Consider temporal financial factors when developing plans for strategic naloxone distribution.
- Increase awareness about the health risks associated with cocaine and polysubstance use; promote local resources for treatment and recovery support for polysubstance use.
- Increase outreach to individuals or family members who have lost a loved one to overdose. Provide outreach to individuals or family members who may be living with a substance use disorder and experienced the loss of a loved one due to overdose.
- Continue to partner with faith-based organizations to disseminate treatment and recovery resource materials. Encourage faith communities to offer recovery support services to members.
- Increase awareness about the availability of comprehensive, whole-person treatment services across the state.
- Continue to connect parents and caregivers who have a history of opioid use disorder to treatment and recovery support services, particularly during child custody transitions.

ROAD Team Recommendations for Structural Overdose Prevention

- Expand buprenorphine access to people who are uninsured and have opioid use disorder.
- Expand low-threshold buprenorphine treatment options for people with opioid use disorder.
- Amend Rhode Island regulations to include the tracking of all prescription medications in the Rhode Island Prescription Drug Monitoring Program database.
- Consider including data from the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (DLT) to inform ROAD case reviews.
- Utilize the Rhode Island DLT Unemployment Insurance Division to distribute treatment and recovery resources to people receiving unemployment benefits.
- Consider amending the Rhode Island Good Samaritan Law to protect people who have active arrest warrants.
- Address or develop policies to decriminalize the possession of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), specifically buprenorphine.
- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of patient outcomes associated with the expansion of methadone take-home treatment, particularly during the activation of Rhode Island's COVID-19 Stay-At-Home Order.

References:

1. Katz, J., Goodnough, A., & Sanger-Katz, M. (2020, July 15). In shadow of pandemic, U.S. drug overdose deaths resurge to record. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/15/upshot/drug-overdose-deaths.html>
2. Alter, A. & Yeager, C. (2020 June). *COVID-19 impact on U.S. national overdose crisis*. Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program.
<http://www.odmap.org/Content/docs/news/2020/ODMAP-Report-June-2020.pdf>