

Overdose and Suicide Driving a Decline in Life Expectancy

The average life expectancy in the United States has decreased in two of the past three years, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Two highly avoidable causes are responsible for much of the decline – drug overdose and suicide.

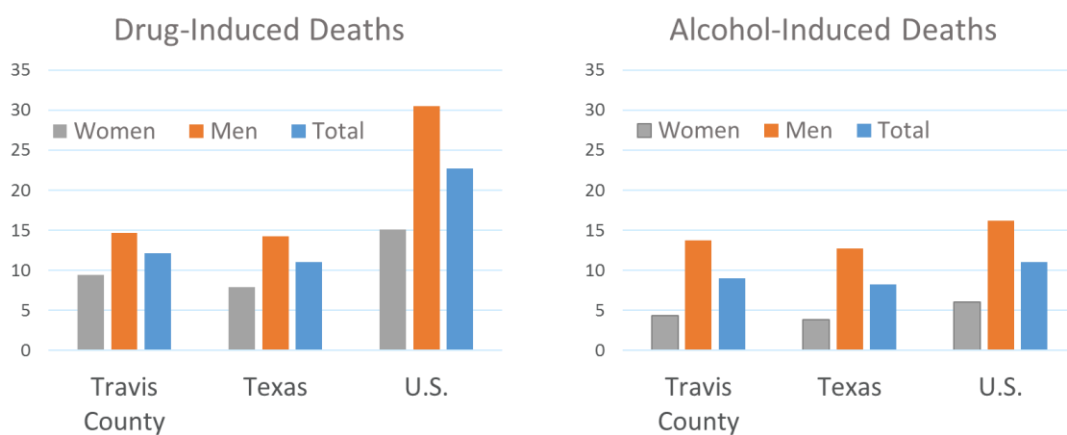
We often hear that the opioid epidemic is not a problem in Texas or locally, however, recent data bring these assumptions into question. For the first time in three years, heroin was the number one drug identified in overdose deaths in Travis County. Another trend to watch is the statewide increase in heroin and synthetic opioid deaths. When considered together, these opiate drugs far surpass deaths due to methamphetamine or cocaine.

Suicide is the leading cause of premature deaths for young adults in our nation, and people with substance use disorder are almost six times more likely to attempt suicide than those without a substance use disorder. Suicide and the abuse of drugs and alcohol are pressure points – indicators that we are not adequately responding to the needs and well-being of people in our community.

Deaths due to alcohol and drugs

Drug and alcohol induced deaths in Travis County are higher than the state rate and lower than the U.S. rate. The charts below reflect deaths caused by alcohol or drugs, such as intentional and unintentional overdose and deaths due to diseases caused by drug or alcohol use.

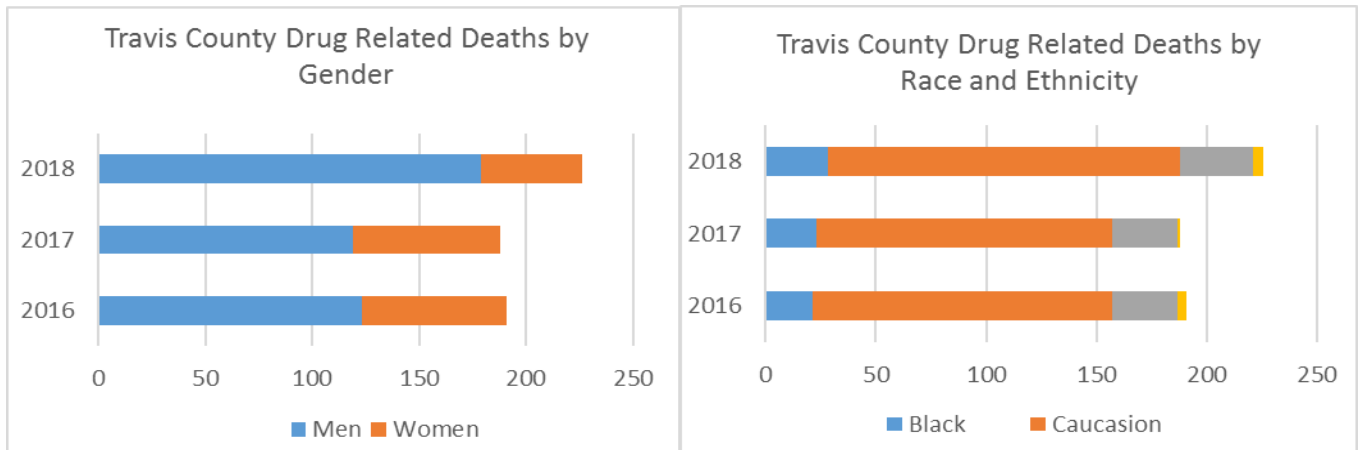
Drug & Alcohol Induced Deaths, 2017 (rate per 100,000 population)



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, 2018

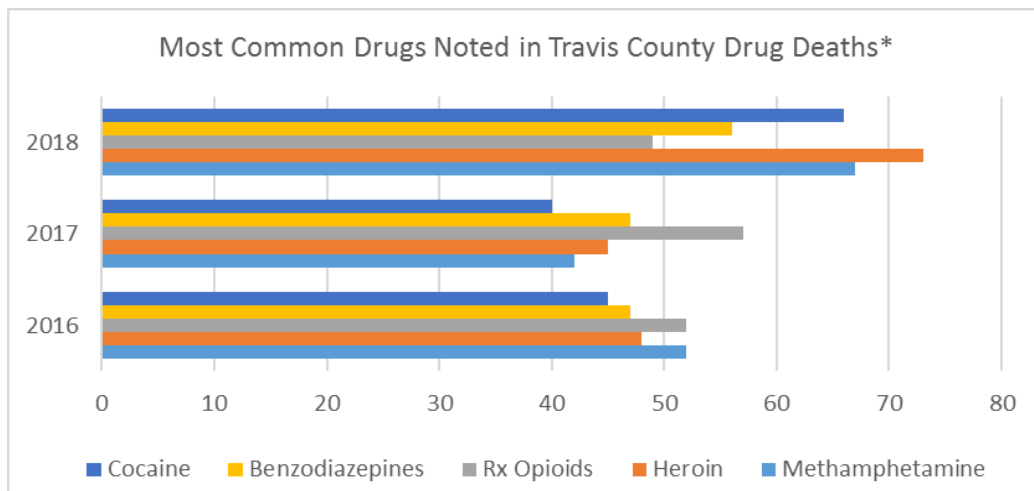
Drug related deaths in Travis County

There were 226 drug-related deaths in Travis County in 2018, according to the Travis County Medical Examiner’s Office. White men are overrepresented in these deaths.



Source: Travis County Medical Examiner’s Office

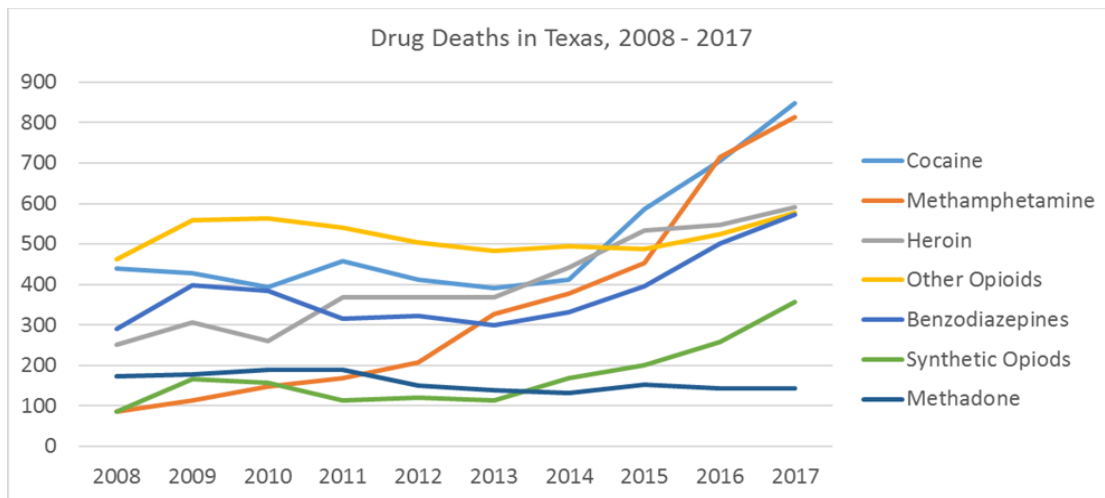
Heroin was noted in more Travis County drug overdose deaths than any other drug in 2018. The rate of drug deaths due to prescription opioids fell slightly, perhaps reflecting tighter controls and changing practices that reduce the amount of opioids prescribed. It is interesting to note that, as deaths due to prescription opioids have decreased, deaths due to heroin have increased.



Source: Travis County Medical Examiner’s Office

* More than one drug may be noted in a single death. “Benzodiazepines” includes deaths due to Alprozolam, Diazepam and Clonazepam. “Rx Opioids” includes deaths caused by Hydrocodone, Oxycodone, Methadone and prescription fentanyl.

Cocaine and methamphetamine are the primary killers for people in the State of Texas. However, according to the State epidemiologist, opioids are present in about half of all accidental poisoning deaths, and among youth and young adults, opioids are present in over 70% of drug overdose deaths. These youth trends combined with the data below that show the recent increase in deaths due to heroin and synthetic opioids (mostly fentanyl) raise concerns that the opioid epidemic has reached Texas.



Source: [National Drug Early Warning System](#)

Suicide deaths in Travis County

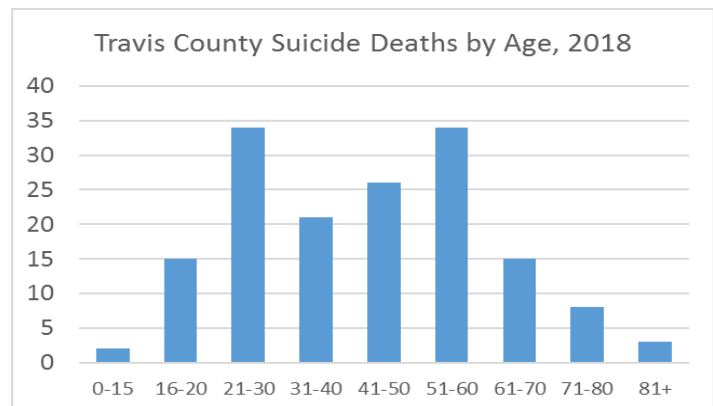
Men are more likely to die from suicide than women, but the suicide rate for women is growing at a faster pace. Research by [JAMA Network](#) has found that the suicide rate for girls aged 10 to 14 has increased at an especially high rate at the national level. It is also concerning to note that the suicide rate for women in Travis County is higher than both the state and national rate.

According to the Travis County Medical Examiner’s Office, there were 158 suicide deaths in Travis County in 2018. The highest rates of suicide occurred among the working age population between the ages of 21 and 60.

Suicide Death Rates per 100,000 population, 2017

	Males	Females	Total
Travis County	19.5	7.1	13.4
Texas	21.1	5.7	13.3
U.S.	22.9	6.3	14.5

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Underlying Cause of Death, 2017.



Source: Travis County Medical Examiner’s Office

The link between substance use disorder and suicide

Research shows a link between substance use disorder and suicide.

- People with a substance use disorder (SUD) attempt suicide nearly six times more often than people without a substance use disorder.
- The rate of completed suicides for men with a substance use disorder is 2 to 3 times higher than for men without SUD.
- For women, the risk of suicide death for those with SUD is 6.5 to 9 times higher.

Source: "Drug Addiction as Risk for Suicide Attempts," Dragisic, Dickov, Mijatovic, 2015, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health

Conclusion

While Texas and Travis County have not felt the impact of the opioid crisis to the extent that other communities in the United States have, we see increasingly troubling trends. For the first time in three years, heroin was the top drug noted in overdose deaths in Travis County in 2018. The State epidemiologist notes an increase in heroin deaths, especially among younger Texans, which may explain why a youthful Travis county has experienced higher rates. Also, when heroin drug deaths are combined with synthetic and other opioid drugs, the rate of opiate drug-related overdoses far surpasses deaths due to other drugs. Other trends to note and follow include the fact that female suicide rates for Travis County, while lower than male suicide rates, exceed both the state and national rates.