



NEWS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Number of opioid overdose deaths increases for third year

Columbia, S.C. – For the third year in a row, the number of opioid-involved overdose deaths has increased in the Palmetto State, according to data collected by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. During a meeting today of the state’s Opioid Emergency Response Team (OERT), officials announced that from 2014 to 2017, the total number of deaths related to opioid overdose increased by 47%, from 508 to 748 deaths.

“This new data demonstrates the devastating effects that the opioid crisis continues to have on our state,” said Governor Henry McMaster. “While the combined efforts of the OERT’s members and the many other South Carolinians dedicated to combating this public health emergency are having a positive impact, there is still much work to be done, but I know we have the right team in place to continue improving the services we provide to those suffering from opioid use disorder.”

The total number of prescription drug-involved overdose deaths, which include non-opioid drugs, increased by 37%, from 572 deaths in 2014 to 782 in 2017. Heroin-involved overdose deaths saw a sharp increase of 153%, from 57 to 144 deaths. Overall, fentanyl-involved overdose deaths saw the largest increase of 432%, from 68 to 362 deaths from 2014 to 2017. Deaths due to methadone, however, continue to decrease from 79 in 2014 to 45 in 2017, which is consistent with national trends, as methadone is used for the treatment of opioid use disorder.

“The opioid crisis cannot be solved by any single organization. It takes partners with different areas of expertise working together. The work the response team is doing is critical in addressing this complex public health threat,” said Dr. Lilian Peake, DHEC Director of Public Health.

Three major metropolitan areas (Charleston, Greenville and Richland counties) all saw considerable increases from 2016 to 2017 in opioid-involved deaths. However, Horry County, which has the largest burden of opioid misuse in the state, saw a substantial decrease in opioid-involved overdose deaths (24%, from 101 in 2016 to 77 in 2017). Efforts around response and prevention, such as a unified task force and coalition, have been implemented in Horry County, which may have contributed to the decline in the overdose death rate.

“Increasing the availability of the anti-overdose drug naloxone and ensuring the availability of a full spectrum of resources – from prevention to treatment to recovery support – are essential to decreasing the number of opioid overdose deaths in our state,” said Sara Goldsby, Director of the S.C. Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services.

The new 2017 data soon will be available on the map-based data portal that is part of the state’s opioid crisis education campaign website, justplainkillers.com/data/, which displays opioid-related mortality data and is searchable by county. The data displayed is provided as part of the OERT collaboration including DAODAS, DHEC and others.

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The South Carolina Opioid Emergency Response Team is a collaborative effort created by executive order issued by Governor Henry McMaster. The OERT is comprised of state and local agencies with expertise in substance use disorders and treatment, public health and medical affairs, emergency response and planning, as well as law enforcement coordination and strategy. For more information, visit justplainkillers.com.

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