



2023-2024

# ANNUAL REPORT

Winnebago County  
Overdose Fatality Review

## PERSISTING IN OUR COMMITMENT

The work of the Winnebago County Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) team over the last six years has not just been to confront a crisis, but to affirm our commitment to saving lives, and to stand together as a community to help each other. Each person who is part of this work represents a beacon of hope—a reminder that change is possible, that compassion can triumph over judgment, and that we can forge a path toward healing and resilience. We continue to remember those we've lost and honor their lives. Our work is a pledge to spread awareness, support those in their journey toward recovery, and dismantle the stigma that shadows addiction.

This report explains why we do this, our work, and the work we have left to do. The OFR team is a multidisciplinary team of 47 partners representing 35 agencies. People come together monthly to review cases of people who have died from overdoses to see where we had opportunities to serve them as a community and find ways to address gaps to save lives.

Our team, and hopefully the broader community, remembers that it is in our unity, our empathy, and our actions that we find our strength. Together, we can save lives, restore hope, and create a future without anyone being left behind.

**#weheartyourecovery**

## 2024 - 2025 PRIORITIES

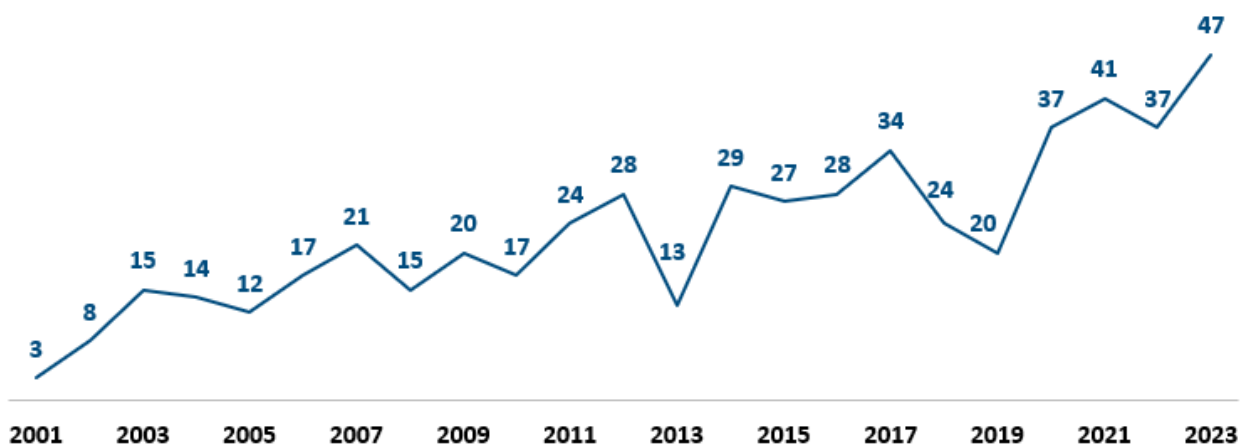
Every year, the OFR team votes on the priorities for their work based on case reviews and data trends. For the upcoming year, the OFR team has prioritized work and recommendations around the following areas:

**Close gaps in communication between systems to strengthen continuum of care.** People are continuing to fall through cracks in the system. It is crucial for our community to prioritize the establishment of effective communication channels and foster a seamless continuum of care across all systems.

**Identify children falling between gaps and connect them to support.** Minors left behind after a family member's overdose are not receiving the help they need. This lack of necessary support and access to services for children and their families experiencing these traumas exacerbates their suffering.

**Focus on preventive efforts (i.e., trauma, early substance use).** To save lives, it is crucial to prioritize multifaceted preventive efforts, such as addressing trauma and early substance use. This focus should extend to children, individuals who have experienced nonfatal overdoses, and the family and friends left behind. By collaborating with substance use organizations, we can enhance our initiatives to prevent substance use among both youth and adults.

**In 2023, there were 47 overdose deaths in Winnebago County, which exceeds the number of overdose deaths we have seen in any previous year.**



# 2023 Fatal Overdose Data from Winnebago County

This page represents confirmed data for 2023 overdose deaths in the county as shared by the Winnebago County Medical Examiner’s Office.



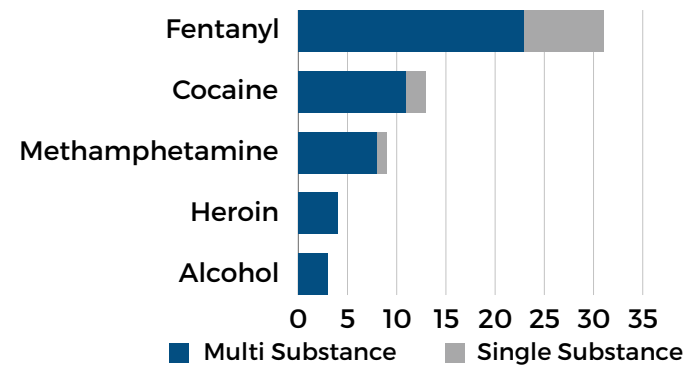
**Sex/Gender\*:** 13 victims were listed as Female, 34 victims were listed as Male



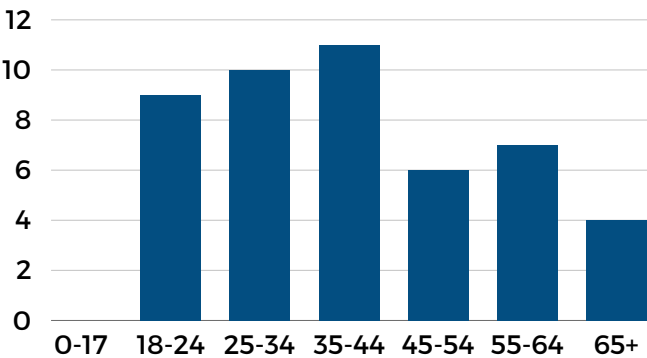
**Race/Ethnicity\*:** 43 victims were listed as White; 4 victims were listed as either Black, Hispanic, or American Indian

\*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 2023, Fentanyl was listed as a primary cause of death in 31 overdose deaths in Winnebago County.



In 2023, the majority of overdose deaths in Winnebago County occurred among individuals aged 18-44.



In 2023, Winnebago County had an overdose death rate of 2.7 per 10,000 people. City of Neenah and City of Oshkosh 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	28	4.2	66,816
City of Neenah	13	4.7	27,319
Village of Fox Crossing	2	1.1	18,974
Cities of Menasha & Appleton	4	2.4	16,702
Winnebago County Total	47	2.7	171,730

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.

In 2023, there were 7 suicide overdose deaths, an increase from previous years. Many of the individuals seen in the emergency departments for nonfatal overdoses also expressed suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviors. This documents the increase in deaths of despair, which are deaths by suicide, overdose, and alcohol-related diseases.

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7144704/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7144704/)



# 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 2023-24, several recurring themes were identified:

- **Mental Health History:** Most victims who died of overdose had a documented history of mental health disorders. Specifically in 2023, an increase was seen in the number of ADHD and co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) cases reviewed. Many victims did not receive the treatment and services needed to support their mental health and SUDs.
- **Youth and Adolescents:** Children of parents who passed away due to overdose deaths continue to be disproportionately impacted. The impact of this trauma is worsened by a lack of support and access to vital services for children and families who experience trauma. This includes the need to understand better ways to address trauma and support mental health and SUD treatment for adolescents.
- **Access to Treatment:** The need to address gaps among treatment, mental health, primary care, and other key agencies was apparent in many overdose deaths. Our community needs to continue actively supporting and strengthening the continuum of care and all models of evidence-based treatment and recovery.
- **Relationships and Connection:** Many victims felt isolated and that they had little or no support. Some groups, such as LGBTQIA or people of color, are disproportionately impacted. Affinity groups and/or peer support can help foster relationships and build support to reduce the recurrence of use and bolster recovery.



## 2023 - 2024 Recommendations

Based on OFR data, the team develops recommendations to create change in our community to save lives. The team created and voted on the following recommendations this past year:

- Provide training for OFR partners on the risk factors of HIV and Hepatitis C.
- Create a better understanding of treatment options within the Department of Corrections and how it links to community-based programs/treatment [for OFR partners].
- Conduct stakeholder listening sessions with Emergency Department staff, treatment providers, and other members of the medical community to better understand the needs, areas for collaboration, and gaps in care that exist when treating people with a substance use disorder.
- Provide access to Narcan at gas stations.
- Provide educational opportunities for OFR team members to better understand the intersection of generational trauma and substance use.
- Explore the correlation between ADHD and SUD to determine prevention opportunities to decrease the risk of overdose.
- Elevated to the state - Address policies (i.e., licensing, billing, state statutes) to integrate care for mental health and substance use systems of care in the state of Wisconsin.

*All photos in this report were provided thanks to Mirrorless Productions.*

# Ripple Effects of OFR

## A Breadth of Effects

In December 2023, OFR team members participated in a Ripple Effect Mapping session to document the changes produced by OFR over the last five years.

The process asks each participant to share two or three successes. The group then visually maps them, organizes them into themes, and documents what happened as a result of the success.

Through this process, the ripple effects of the OFR can be seen at the individual, relationship, programmatic, agency, community, and system levels. Members identified 132 ripple effects.



### Most Identified Effects:



#### Programmatic Effects & Changes (n = 36)

- New programs
- Expansion and improvements to existing programs
- Positive client impacts
- Need more resources



#### Better Knowledge & Understanding (n = 28)

- Other agencies
- Addiction and substance use
- Effects of trauma
- Biases about addiction and substance use
- Programs



#### People Talk & Feel Differently (n = 25)

- Moving from hopeless to hopeful
- Started positive conversations
- Changed language
- More compassion & trust

*n = number of times effect was documented by OFR partners*

OFR brings “everyone together in the same room at the same time... [it’s] lots of agencies coming together, making a big impact.”

**Note :** Additional effects were identified, including: new and increased collaboration; reduced stigma; better connections for clients; effects within the recovery community; increased OFR credibility; and, hope for those affected by substance use.

# 2023-24 Impact

Over the last six years, the OFR team has voted on 54 recommendations and worked on 11 community projects (e.g., branding, We Heart You event, pilot projects, etc.). The timeline for completion of recommendations vary. While some recommendations are achieved within months, most require years, particularly when they involve complex systems. Below are some highlights of the successes our team has celebrated this year. This progress is made possible through the dedication of our many OFR partners, who consistently demonstrate a willingness to collaborate beyond their traditional roles.

## Expanding Handle with Care Countywide

Since its inception in 2020 as a partnership between the Oshkosh Police Department and the Oshkosh Area School District, the program has significantly expanded. Over the past four years, it has grown to include Lourdes Academy, Valley Christian, and the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office. In the 2023-24 academic year, the program has further extended to include additional police departments and school districts in Fox Crossing, Menasha, Neenah, Omro, and Winneconne. Countywide programming is pivotal to addressing childhood trauma and bridging gaps for students who might otherwise fall through the cracks in the varying systems of our cities and villages.

*This work addresses the following OFR recommendations:*

- *Improve support and resiliency in children that have experienced trauma by expanding the Handle with Care program throughout the county.*
- *Establish a process where youth exposed to trauma that do not reach the level of Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention can be referred to community-based services and resources.*

## The SPRT and STAR Programs

The Solutions Peer Response Team (SPRT) was created because of OFR recommendations and partnerships. The SPRT is a peer-driven program made up of staff who all have lived experience and are trained recovery coaches or peer support professionals. They are available 24/7 to respond to any substance use-related need in our community at no cost. Since starting in September 2022, the program has noted positive results, particularly with its strong partnership with the Winnebago County Jail. In its second year, the program in the jail expanded to become a key collaborator in the Sobriety Treatment Assisted Recovery (STAR) program, including a recovery pod, therapy dog, and extra incentives for those participating in recovery pod programming. To learn more about the SPRT you can look at it's annual report (<https://shorturl.at/ehW79>).

*Addressing the following OFR Recommendations:*

- *Pilot a data-driven proactive rapid response team in Winnebago County that aims to prevent overdose deaths.*
- *Increase use of and access to peer recovery coaches for persons who are at high risk of overdose deaths through coordination of services and cross-system approaches (EMS/ED, law enforcement, post release from jail, friend/family after OD death).*
- *Identify strategies to reduce overdoses that occur shortly after release from incarceration.*

## We Heart You Movement

Our "We Heart You" motto is a movement that started in Winnebago County and has quickly expanded across the nation. It breaks the stigma of addiction and recovery and provides hope that when we care for people, things can get better. We continue to offer the website ([www.weheartyou.org](http://www.weheartyou.org)), the We Heart You App, the We Heart You Community Award of Excellence (presented to Megan Edwards and Trevor Fenrich of Solutions Recovery in 2023), and the We Heart You: Recovery in Our Community Event.

*Addressing the following OFR Recommendations:*

- *Promote and share resources to family/friends of people who use drugs for the purpose of recognizing signs/symptoms of substance use disorder and to connect to support services.*
- *Support and expand a substance free culture that engages many stakeholders in our community that focuses on the support of individuals and families that are on a path to recovery.*



# WE ♥ YOU

The March 13, 2024 event was a day where Winnebago County was at its best. Community members showed up to break the silence, reduce stigma, and save lives. To catch the recap video and additional speaker videos, scan the above QR code or go to [www.weheartyou.org/recovery-event-2024](http://www.weheartyou.org/recovery-event-2024).

Community and positivity radiated from the room as state and county leadership, community members, and those in recovery shared stories of resilience and success. Keynote speaker Vin Baker, a basketball All-Star, gold medal Olympian, and an Assistant Coach for the Milwaukee Bucks, shared his story of success, addiction, and recovery. Living much of his addiction in the public eye, Baker's message reminds people that addiction is a disease and should be met with the same hope and help as any other disease. "Being challenged in life is inevitable. It's inevitable we will fall down. It's inevitable that we're going to face adversity. But being defeated is optional." His continued message of resiliency and strength reminds us that anyone can overcome addiction.



"Hope plays an instrumental role in our commitment to our work, healing and sobriety. The reason I'm here is because we all matter. I'm here to help break the silence and to remove the stigma." - Vin Baker



During 2023-24, Winnebago County's OFR work and the message of "We Heart You" has been shared at the following conferences and events:

- Overdose Data to Action Public Health, Public Safety Convening
- Fox Valley Technical College Substance Use Disorder Conference
- Women's Fund of Oshkosh, "Substance Use and Mental Health" Pillar of Knowledge Panel
- Wisconsin Working Together to Combat Drug Challenges Conference
- National Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) Forum
- Wisconsin Department of Corrections' Virtual MAT and Harm Reduction Conference
- Wisconsin's Department of Human Services' Opioids, Stimulants, and Trauma Conference

# What Can I Do 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. **#weheartyourecovery**

Connect someone to the Solutions Peer Response Team. Download the We Heart You App or call 1-866-465-0010 to talk to someone who's been through it

Volunteer your skills/time at recovery organizations & events, like Recovery Fest in Oshkosh on Sept 7, 2024 [solutionsrecovery.org/recovery-fest-2/](https://solutionsrecovery.org/recovery-fest-2/)

Go to the Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD, 112 Otter Ave., Oshkosh) to get trained on how to use Narcan for you, your loved ones, or your community. Get FREE Narcan and Fentanyl Test Strips at WCHD, M-F from 8am-4pm

Join and follow the We Heart You Recovery Facebook page. Be there for others, and don't give up on hope



Volunteer with Breakwater [breakwaterwi.org](https://breakwaterwi.org) to help prevent and reduce youth substance use in Winnebago County

Donate to a local treatment or recovery organization like Apricity, Nova Counseling, Solutions Recovery, or Unity Recovery Services

Share a resource. Connect someone you know who may be grieving from a substance use passing of a loved one. Contact: [foxcitiesgrasp@gmail.com](mailto:foxcitiesgrasp@gmail.com) to find out more

Attend or invite friends to free mental health and substance use disorder services through Collaborative Wellness at [collaborativewellnesswi.com](https://collaborativewellnesswi.com)

Thank you to all the OFR partners who consistently dedicate their time and efforts to our mission. Your commitment to collaboratively tackling the root causes of overdose deaths is invaluable. Together, we are shaping our community into a thriving place where everyone can live, work, and flourish. Thank you for all that you do!

**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)

## Winnebago County OFR Partners

Addiction Medical Solutions of Wisconsin  
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  
Department of Justice  
Fox Crossing Police Department  
Gold Cross Ambulance Service  
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
Lake Winnebago Area Metropolitan  
Enforcement Group  
Neenah Police Department  
Northeast Wisconsin 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