

## What is an opioid?

An opioid is a drug that eases pain and may also cause feelings of extreme pleasure. Opioids act on the brain and nerves and include both prescription medications and illegal drugs like heroin. Opioids can be addictive with regular use or misuse.

## What is an opioid overdose?

An overdose is when excess opioids act on the brain to decrease or stop a person's breathing.

## What is addiction?

Addiction is a long term, relapsing disease of the brain characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences. Opioid addiction affects individuals, families and communities.

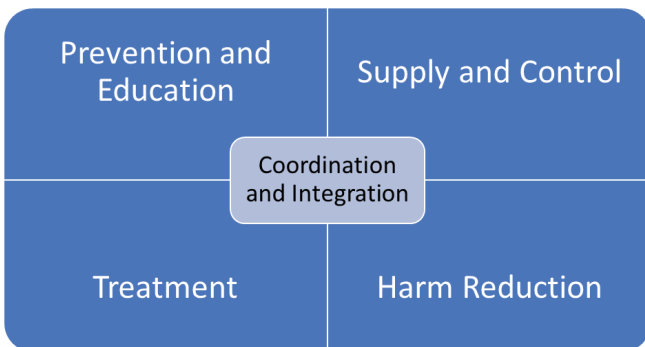
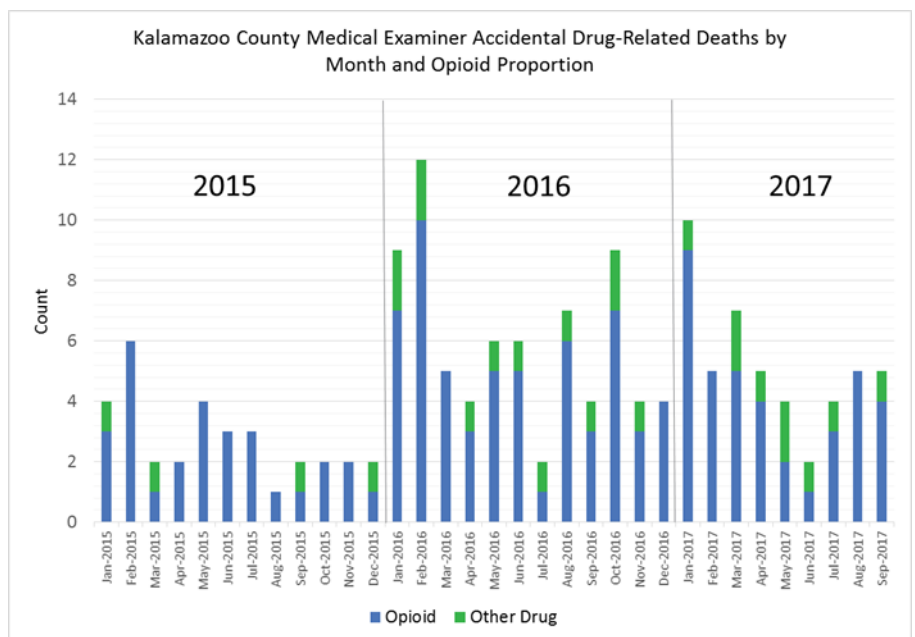
## What is happening in Kalamazoo County?

While the amount of opioids prescribed in Kalamazoo County decreased by 23% from 2010 to 2015, it was higher than the 2015 national average and more than four times higher than the 1999 national average.

On average, 24 Kalamazoo County residents were treated each month for unintentional overdoses (13 for heroin, 11 for other opioids) at a local emergency room in 2016.

From 2015 to 2016, the number of accidental drug-related deaths more than doubled from 33 to 72. Most of these deaths involved opioids; accidental opioid-related deaths doubled from 29 to 59 over the same time period, for an average of five per month. In the first nine months of 2017, there were 47 accidental, drug-related deaths; 38 involved opioids.

During 2016, more people died of an accidental drug-related overdose in Kalamazoo County than of motor vehicle accidents.



Sources:  
[National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)  
[CDC](#)

Local Hospital Emergency Department Visit Reports  
 Kalamazoo County Medical Examiner

## How can we address the opioid epidemic?

A multi-sector, collaborative approach across communities is required. The diagram outlines key strategy buckets necessary to coordinate and integrate action: prevention and education, supply and control of opioids, treatment access across a continuum of care and the reduction of overdoses and the spread of infectious disease through harm reduction efforts. The newly formed Kalamazoo County Opioid Coalition aims to address the opioid epidemic through the coordination and integration of these four strategic buckets.

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Health and Community Services Department

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