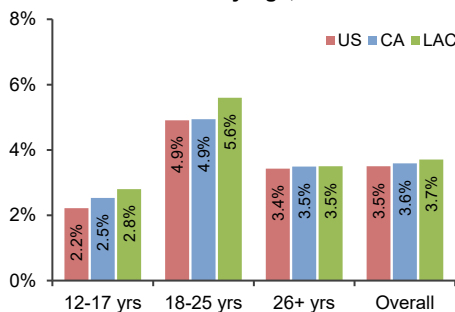


## Prescription (Rx) Opioid Misuse/Abuse and Consequences

July 2022

### Prevalence and Supply

Misuse/Abuse of Rx Opioids (pain medications) in the Past Year by Age, 2018-2020<sup>1</sup>



Misuse/abuse of Rx opioids is most common among individuals aged 18-25 years.

Rx opioids are the **2<sup>nd</sup>** most abused drug<sup>2</sup>

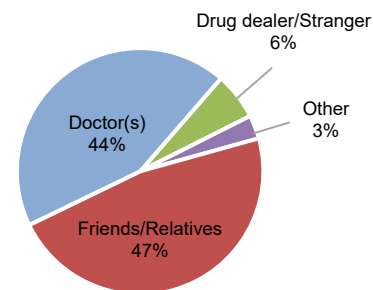
**1 in 8** who used Rx opioids in the past year misused them<sup>2</sup>

Counterfeit pills are widely available across all **50** states in the US<sup>3</sup>

**2 in 5** counterfeit pills with fentanyl contains a lethal dose<sup>3</sup>



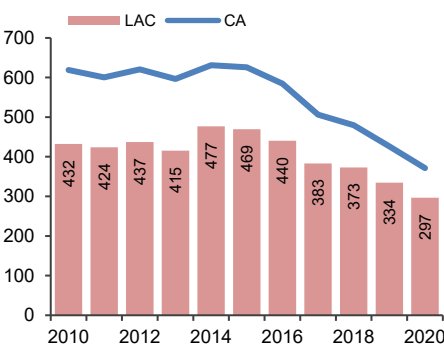
Source of Rx Opioids Among Past Year Misusers, 2020<sup>2</sup>



Most misusers obtained their Rx opioids from a friend/relative or doctors.

### Prescriptions

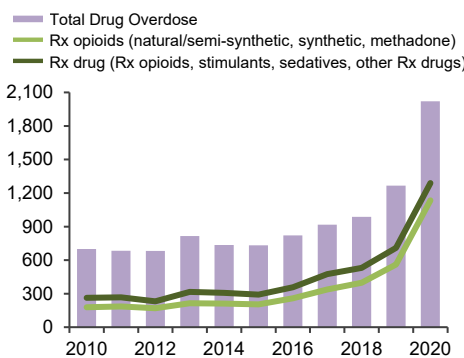
Rate of opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies per 1,000 population, 2010-2020<sup>4</sup>



The rate of opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies has been declining since 2014.

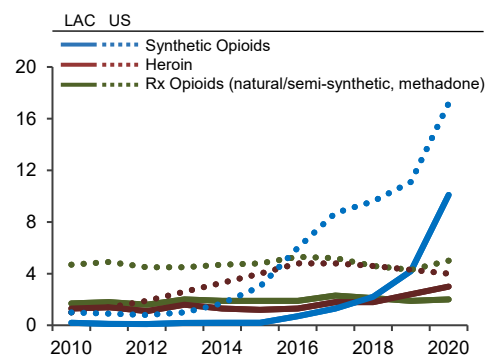
### Deaths

Drug Overdose Deaths in LAC, 2010-2020<sup>5</sup>



64% of drug overdose deaths involved Rx drugs, of which 88% involved Rx opioids.

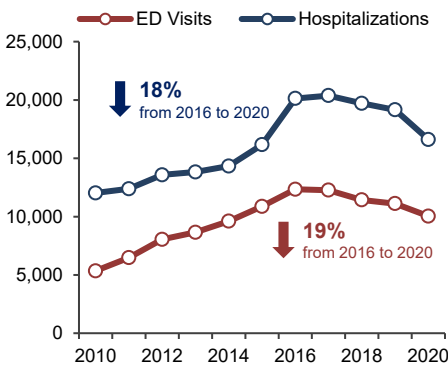
Opioid Death Rates<sup>a</sup> by Opioid Type in the LAC and US, 2010-2020<sup>5</sup>



Synthetic opioid death rate increased starting in 2016, while rates for Rx opioids and heroin remained stable.

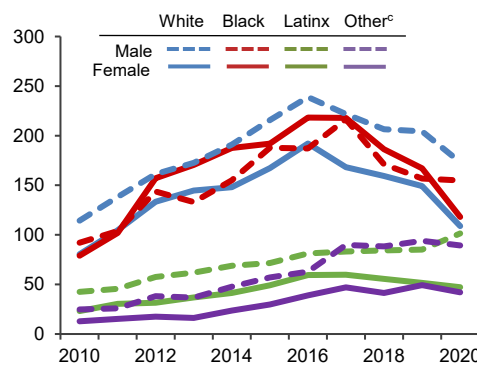
### Healthcare Utilization

Opioid<sup>b</sup> (excluding heroin) ED Visits and Hospitalizations in LAC, 2010-2020<sup>6</sup>



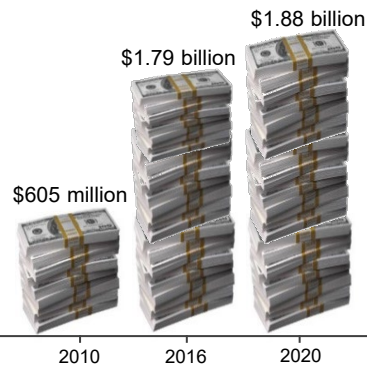
Rx opioid-related healthcare utilization increased up to 2016, then began to slightly decline.

Opioid<sup>b</sup> (excluding heroin) ED Visit Rates<sup>a</sup> by Gender and Race/Ethnicity<sup>c</sup> in LAC, 2010-2020<sup>6</sup>



Rx opioid-related ED visit rates were highest among White males for all years over the past decade.

Total Annual Charges for Opioid<sup>b</sup> (excluding heroin) Hospitalizations in LAC, 2010 and 2020<sup>6</sup>

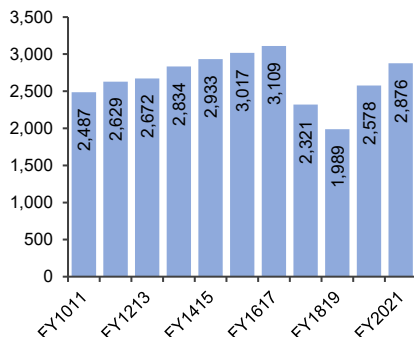


The economic burden (2021 US dollars) of Rx opioid misuse/abuse greatly increased over recent years.

<sup>a</sup> Per 100,000 population. <sup>b</sup> Records with any opioid-related (excluding heroin and abuse/dependence in remission) condition listed as a diagnosis or external cause of injury. <sup>c</sup> Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other. <sup>d</sup> Per 100,000 population aged 12+. <sup>e</sup> Due to methodological changes in reporting race, use caution when comparing race/ethnicity rates for 2020 with prior years.

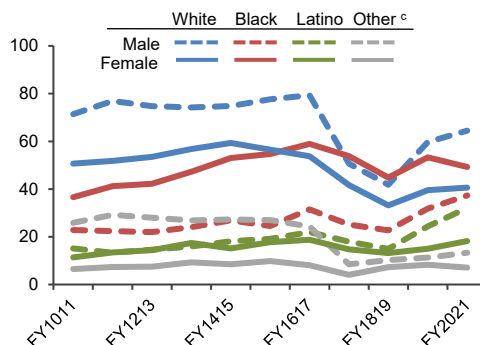
### Treatment Admissions

**Primary Rx Opioid Admissions in LAC, FY1011-FY2021<sup>7</sup>**



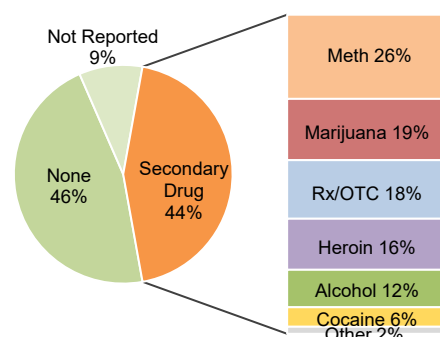
Treatment admissions for a primary Rx opioid problem increased from FY1011 to FY1617, and again from FY1819 to FY2021.

**Rate<sup>d</sup> of Primary Rx Opioid Admissions by Gender and Race/Eth. in LAC, FY1011-FY2021<sup>7</sup>**



Whites had the highest rates of Rx opioid treatment admissions over the last decade. The rate for Black women surpassed that of White women by FY1617.

**Secondary Drug Problem Among Primary Rx Opioid Admissions in LAC, FY2021<sup>7</sup>**



About 44% of primary Rx opioids admissions had a secondary drug problem in FY2021, with methamphetamine being the most common.

#### 1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health. 2018-2020 NSDUH Substate Region Estimates by Age Group

**Prevalence**  
 • In Los Angeles County (LAC) in 2018-2020, 3.7% of individuals aged 12 or older misused/abused prescription (Rx) pain relievers (primarily opioids) in the past year.  
**Misuse/Abuse by Age**  
 • Misuse/abuse of Rx pain relievers in the past year was most common among individuals aged 18-25 years old at 5.6% in LAC.  
 • LAC had higher rates of Rx pain reliever misuse/abuse among youth (2.8%) and young adults (5.6%) compared to California (youth 2.5%, young adults 4.9%) and US (youth 2.2%, young adults 4.9%) in 2018-2020.  
 • Rx pain relievers included prescription forms of fentanyl, and does not include illicitly manufactured forms of fentanyl from clandestine laboratories.

#### 2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

**Prevalence**  
 • In the US in 2020, 9.3 million (3.3%) individuals aged 12 or older misused/abused Rx pain relievers in the past year, making it the second most abused illicit drug, only after marijuana.  
 • Among those who took Rx pain relievers in the past year, nearly 1 in 8 (12.3%) reported misusing them.  
**Source of Rx Pain Relievers at Last Misuse**  
 • Most (47%) had obtained Rx pain relievers from their friends or relatives; 44% were prescribed Rx pain relievers from one (42%) or more than one (1%) doctor, or stole from health care providers (1%); 6% bought from a drug dealer or other stranger; and 3% by other sources.

#### 3. United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment and Counterfeit Pills Factsheet. 2021.

**Counterfeit Pills**  
 • Counterfeit pills have been found in all 50 states, and have been dramatically increasing in the US.  
 • Counterfeit Rx opioids are easily accessible, including among youth, as many are sold on social media and e-commerce platforms.  
**Fentanyl**  
 • The DEA seized more than 20 million counterfeit pills in 2021, many of which contained fentanyl, the synthetic opioid that is the primary driver of drug overdose deaths in the US.

• From 2014 to 2019, the number of fentanyl reports identified by forensic labs increased by 1,712% from 5,541 in 2014 to 100,378 in 2019.  
 • In 2021, 4 out of every 10 pills with fentanyl seized by the DEA contained at least 2 mg of fentanyl, which is a potentially lethal dose that is equivalent in size to a few grains of salt.

#### 4. California Department of Public Health. Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System. California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard

• In 2010-2020, over 400 opioid prescriptions were filled per 1,000 residents in LAC each year on average.  
 • At the peak in 2014, there were enough opioids prescribed to supply a bottle of opioids to over half of all adults in LAC.  
 • Although rates remain high, opioid prescriptions filled at pharmacies have been declining with the increased use of prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMP) and safer prescribing practices.

#### 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death. CDC WONDER Online Database.

• In 2020, Rx drugs were involved in about 64% of all drug overdose deaths.  
 • The majority (88%) of Rx drug overdose deaths involved Rx opioids.

#### Waves of Opioid Overdose Deaths in the US

1. Increases in Rx opioids (natural/ semi-synthetic and methadone) deaths associated with increased prescribing.
2. Increases in heroin deaths associated with Rx opioid users who transitioned to heroin.
3. Increases in synthetic opioid deaths associated with increases in illicitly manufactured fentanyl found in heroin, counterfeit pills, and cocaine.

• In LAC, sharp increases in synthetic opioid overdose deaths began in 2016 and continued to increase through 2020, while rates of overdose death due to natural/semi-synthetic opioids and heroin remained stable.  
 • Since pharmaceutical and illicit fentanyl cannot be distinguished using existing ICD-10 coding, totals for synthetic opioids may include illicit fentanyl.

#### 6. Department of Health Care Access and Information (previously OSHPD). Emergency Department and Inpatient Discharge Data Set. California Dept of Public Health.

• In LAC, both the number of hospitalizations and emergency department (ED) visits with any opioid-related (excluding heroin) diagnosis or external cause of injury (i.e., abuse, dependence, or poisoning) increased from 2010 to 2016, then began to slightly decline.

• Opioid-related hospitalizations dropped in 2020, possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while opioid-related ED visits remained relatively stable.

**ED Visits by Gender-Race/Ethnicity**  
 • White males consistently had the highest rate of opioid-related ED visits compared to all other gender-race/ethnicity groups in LAC from 2010 to 2020.  
 • While opioid-related ED visit rates began to decrease in 2016-2017 for Whites and Blacks, the rate among Latinx males continued to increase through 2020.

**Hospital Charges**  
 • The average hospital charge per opioid-related (excluding heroin) hospitalization more than doubled from \$50,336 in 2010 to \$113,324 in 2020.  
 • Annual hospital charges for opioid-related (excluding heroin) hospitalizations significantly increased by 211% from \$605 million in 2010 to \$1.88 billion in 2020 ( $p_{trend} < 0.01$ ).  
 • Hospital charges for all hospitalizations with any opioid-related (excluding heroin) diagnosis or external cause of injury from 2010 to 2020 totaled to \$14 billion. All costs are adjusted for inflation to 2021 US dollars.

#### 7. Los Angeles County Participant Reporting System and Substance Use Disorder Information System (Sage). Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

• The number of admissions for individuals aged 12 or older to publicly funded treatment programs reporting Rx opioids as their primary drug problem at admission increased by 25% from FY1011 to FY1617, then dropped in FY1718, possibly due to the launch of the new Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System and the Sage substance use disorder information system in 2017. The number of primary Rx opioid admissions has since increased by 45% from FY1819 to FY2021.

**Treatment Admissions by Gender-Race/Ethnicity**  
 • White men and women had the highest rates of Rx opioids treatment admissions per 100,000 population aged 12 or older from FY1011 to FY1516. The rate among African American women increased over the last decade and surpassed that of White women by FY1617.

**Secondary Drug Problem**  
 • In FY2021, 44% of admissions for a primary Rx opioid problem also reported having a secondary drug problem. Methamphetamine was the most common secondary drug problem, followed by marijuana, other non-opioid Rx drugs or over-the-counter, heroin, alcohol, cocaine, and other drugs.

**Naloxone** is an FDA approved medication that rapidly reverses opioid overdose. In LAC, naloxone can be obtained for free at [multiple locations](#) to people who may be at risk of an opioid overdose.