

Overdose deaths in Stark County rise, again

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After two years of overdose deaths declining, Stark County is seeing an increase this year. It is due to what one expert called “opiate and other drugs 2.0.”

PLAIN TWP. Drug overdose deaths in Stark County are once again on the rise, fueled by opioids, cocaine and methamphetamine use.

After two years in which the number of fatal overdoses dropped, the uptick was anticipated given trends locally and around the state, Stark County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Executive Director John R. Aller said Wednesday.

So far this year, there have been 84 overdose deaths — 56 related to opioids, 16 related to cocaine and, four related to methamphetamine, Aller said, citing data from the Stark County Coroner’s Office.

There were 75 overdose deaths — 55 involving opioids — in the county last year.

Aller spoke Wednesday morning at StarkMHAR’s Conference on Opiates and Addiction.

For several years the county has grappled with opioid use in the form of prescription pills, heroin and fentanyl, but Aller said the community has moved into a situation he called “opiate and other drugs 2.0.”

StarkMHAR was looking to provide evidence-based training on how to treat cocaine and meth use, and the agency continued to expand access to treatment, Aller said.

He noted U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, R-Cincinnati, has been working to make federal dollars earmarked for opioid treatment available for cocaine and methamphetamine treatment, too.

StarkMHAR also wants to raise overdose awareness among minorities and other populations that haven't been impacted as much by the opioid epidemic, but are using other drugs, Aller said.

And Stark is one of 19 counties involved in a \$65.9 million research grant that aims to reduce opioid deaths by 40 percent over three years. The research will look at which strategies have worked and which haven't.

State and local trends

Aller said the increased number of overdose deaths involving cocaine and methamphetamine followed increased seizures of those drugs by local law enforcement.

A similar trend has happened around Ohio.

Methamphetamine is the most-seized drug in the state, and, like cocaine, is often contaminated with fentanyl, said Orman Hall, an analyst for the Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, who also spoke at the conference.

In 2010, there were nine meth-related fatalities and none of them involved fentanyl, but in 2017 there were more than 500 meth-related deaths and 70 percent of them involved fentanyl.

"The increase in both deaths and (law enforcement) seizures around methamphetamines has been staggering," Hall said.

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