



# Addressing Substance Use Issues During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Carolinas Pandemic Preparedness Task Force  
February 28, 2022



## Impact of COVID-19: National Increases in Substance Use and Overdoses

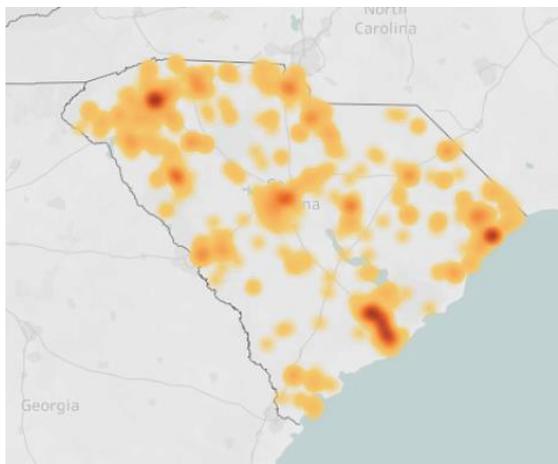
- Alcohol sales in retail stores increased by 21%
- Alcohol sales online increased by 234%
- Cocaine use increased by 10%
- Heroin use increased by 13%
- Methamphetamine use increased by 20%
- Fentanyl use increased by 32%

It's called quarantine coffee. It's just like normal coffee but it has margarita in it and also no coffee.



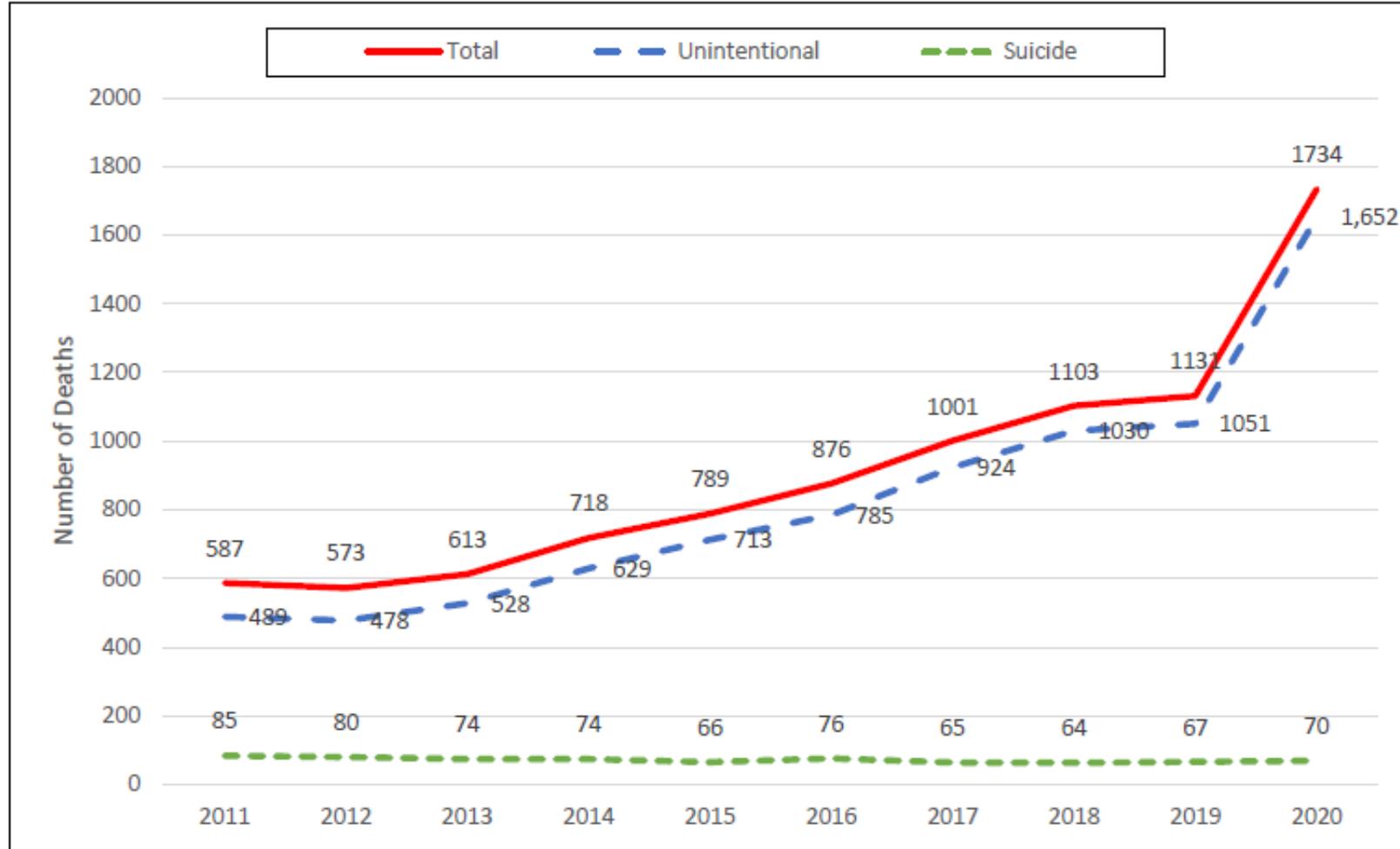
## Overdose Deaths in 2020

- Drug overdose deaths in the U.S. topped 100,000 annually.
- **1,734** South Carolinians died of a drug overdose during the 12-month period ending December 2020.
- This represents a **51.9% increase** from the same time period in 2019.
- Synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, are largely responsible for this increase, with **1,012 (62.4%)** of the total predicted overdose deaths estimated to involve synthetic opioids.



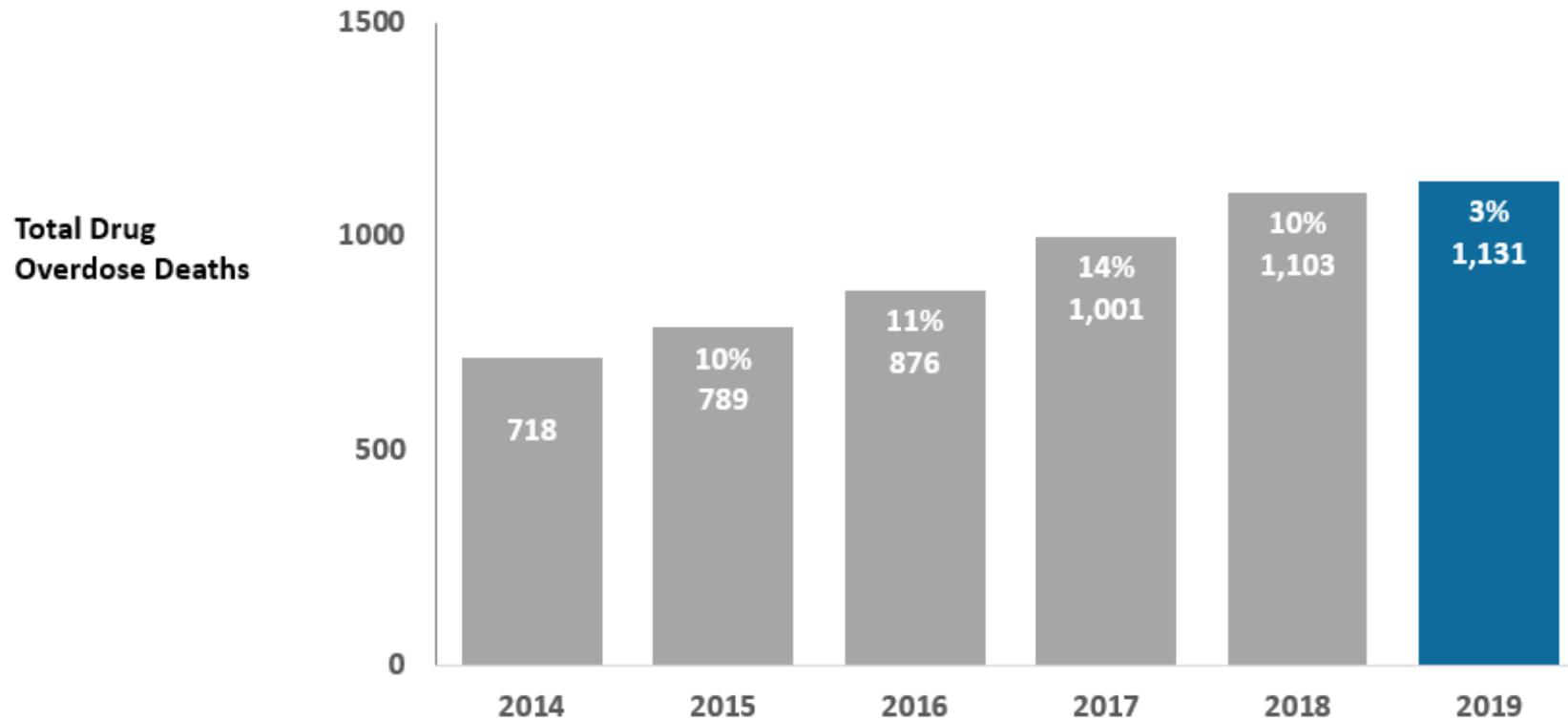
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

Number of Drug Overdose Deaths by Intent  
South Carolina, 2011-2020  
Occurrence Data



Source: SC DHEC, Vital Statistics

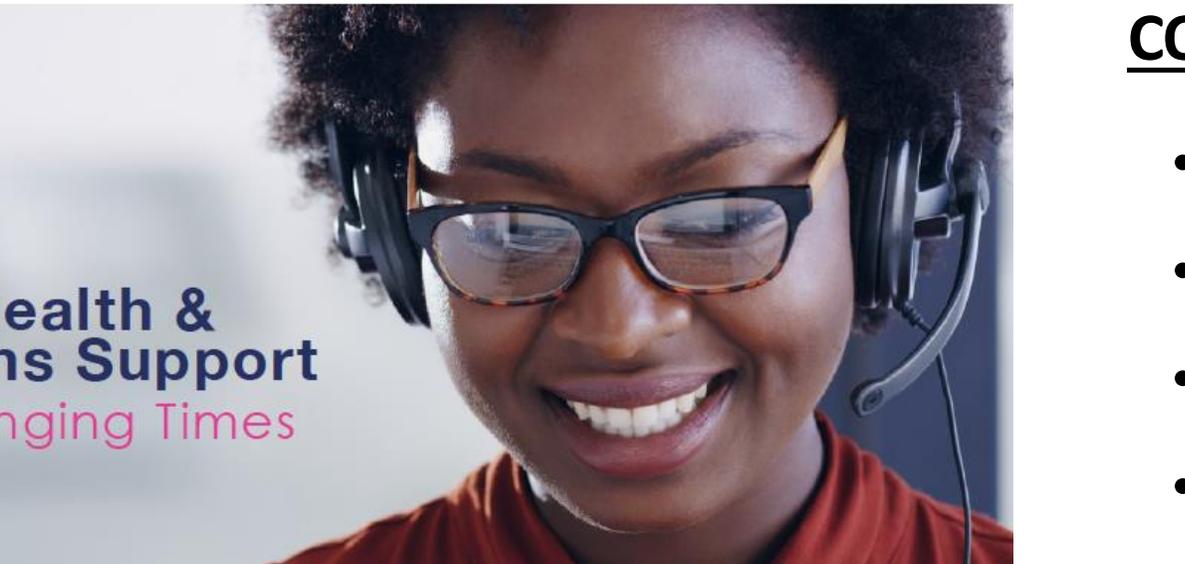
The year-over-year **increase in all drug mortality slowed** over the past two years; total drug overdose deaths increased 3% from 2018 to 2019, down from a 10% increase between 2017 and 2018



Data source: SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, Vital Statistics

## Early Adaptations

- Emergency Plans for Opioid Treatment Providers
  - Authorizing 14- and 28-day take-home doses of methadone for approximately 7,000 patients
- Rapid Narcan<sup>®</sup> Distribution
  - Nearly 6,500 boxes ordered and shipped for free distribution
- Reimbursement Approval
  - Crisis management, psychotherapy, peer support and other behavioral health services provided via telehealth or telephone
  - Alcohol and Drug Safety Action Program for DUI offenders approved for virtual class
- Press Releases and Media Messaging on Service Availability and Prevention Opportunities
- Virtual Recovery Services and Mutual Aid Groups
- Opioid Emergency Response Team Leaders Meeting on Bi-Weekly Calls



## Mental Health & Addictions Support for Challenging Times



### Mental Health Support

You are not alone! Our team is available to listen, provide resources, and connect you to treatment services.



### Addictions Help

Concerned you may have a drug or alcohol problem? Our addiction experts will assist you in finding the help you need.



### Healthcare Workers

Our clinical team offers specialized support for those providing direct care services to COVID-19 patients.



### 24/7 Availability

Our experienced team of mental health and addiction counselors are available day or night. Call us anytime!

CALL US TODAY AT **1-844-SC-HOPES**

## COVID-19 Crisis Response Initiative

- DMH & DAODAS Project
- \$1.9 Million SAMHSA Grant Award
- Began June 2020
- 5,632 Calls Since June 1, 2020
- TV, Social Media, Billboard Marketing
- Spanish and Hearing Impaired Services

## What's Next?

### 988: America's Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline

Building an Integrated, Coordinated System of Crisis Services:

- 24/7 Call/Text Answering
- Mobile Response
- Stabilization Centers



## Telehealth Capacity Before COVID-19

- Strong SC Telehealth Alliance
- All County Authority Treatment Sites Have Telehealth Cart
- DAODAS Subsidizing Providers' Broadband Costs with State Funds
- No Medicaid Reimbursement for Clinical Services
- Approval for Buprenorphine Initiation Limited by State's Board of Medical Examiners



## Tele-Services During COVID-19

- Medicaid/Block Grant/SOR Reimbursement for Clinical Services Approved:  
  
Crisis Management, Individual Psychotherapy, Peer Support, Case Management, and other behavioral health services provided via telehealth *or telephone*
- Each County Authority allocated \$5,000 to purchase cellular phones and minutes for use by patients in need of access
- State's Board of Medical Examiners approve more prescribers to initiate Bupe. via telehealth
- Counselors are working from home and office using doxy.me for clinical services by laptop



## Positive Results

- Patient retention and increased engagement – fewer “no-shows”
- Deeper clinical work with a glimpse at home life and engagement of family
- Patients report high satisfaction and a desire to continue services due to enhanced accessibility, flexibility, and privacy

## Challenges

- Group therapies – Implementation and Revenue Loss
- Walk-ins for new admissions dropped dramatically

## What's Next?

- Outreach and Intervention Services
- Connecting to people who we aren't serving
- Flexibility beyond 9-5 hours. Flexibility beyond the office.
- Recovery without walls



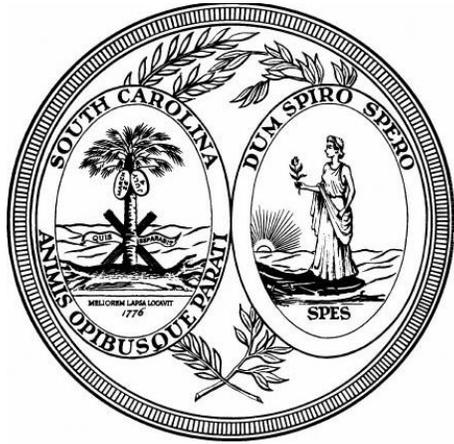
## Other Thoughts About the Future

- Greater need for services for South Carolinians who are and will be hurting
- Policies that ensure virtual services are included across all health plans with consistency.
- Licensing Boards could approve providers for telehealth service long-term.
- We're all going to have to address barriers preventing vulnerable populations from accessing telehealth services (internet connectivity in rural or low-income communities)

## Workforce. Workforce. Workforce.

- The “Great Resignation” of 2021
- Private sector and remote jobs are competitive
- Fatigue is real





South Carolina  
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