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# Focus on Rise in Overdoses The Fentanyl & COVID Epidemics

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# *Outline*

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What do the overdose data show?

Why is this happening?

What is Maine doing about it?

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# Drug deaths are increasing despite efforts by public health & public safety

- 2019 -----380 ...7% increase
- 2020-----515 ...36% increase
- 2021 est.–636 ...23% increase

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# Proportion of deaths due to fentanyl has been increasing

2020      336.....67%

2021 est. 490.....77%

# Fentanyl is extremely lethal

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25X more potent than oxycodone  
50-100X more potent than heroin

Purity is unknown to the user  
Added co-intoxicants unknown to  
user as well.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK537482/table/appanex6.tab2/>

# Maine Reflects National Trends

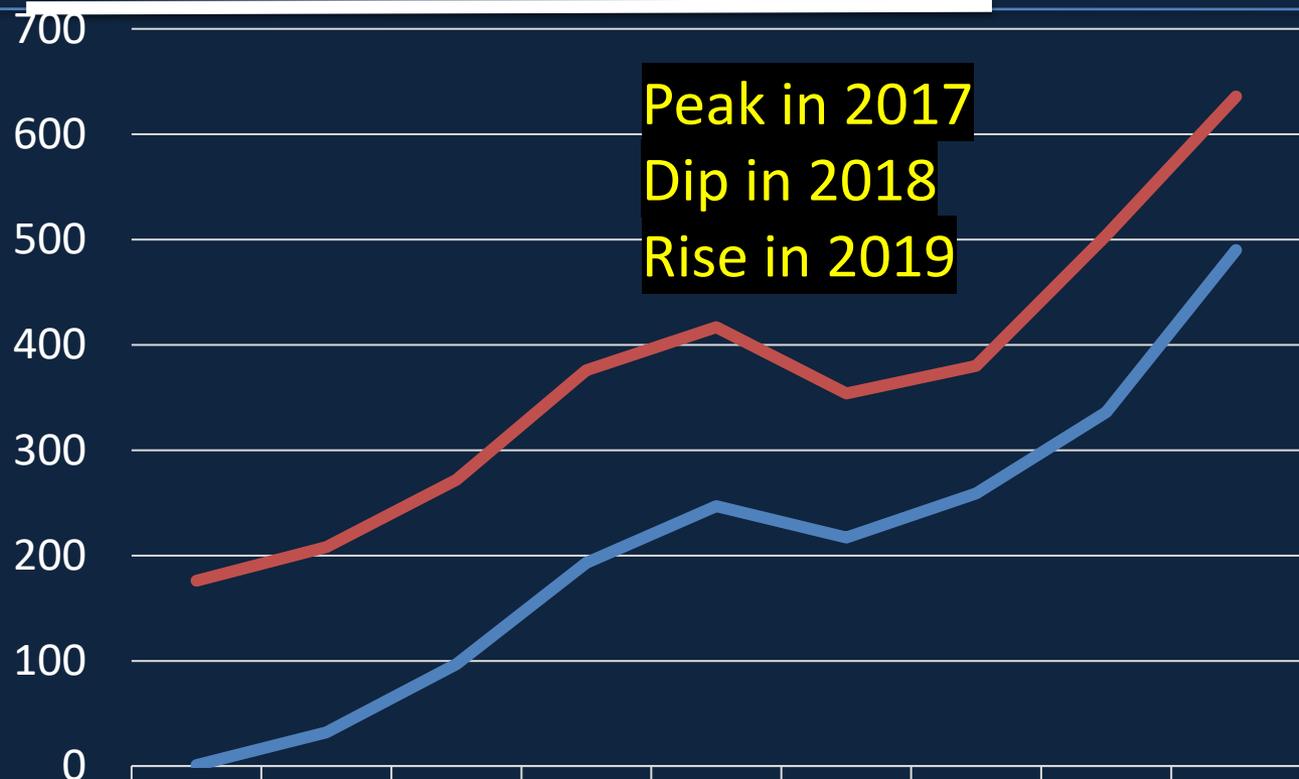
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Drug deaths are being driven by fentanyl lethality in Maine and nationally

- Began in 2013
- Growth nearly exponential
- Now contaminates stimulant drug supply

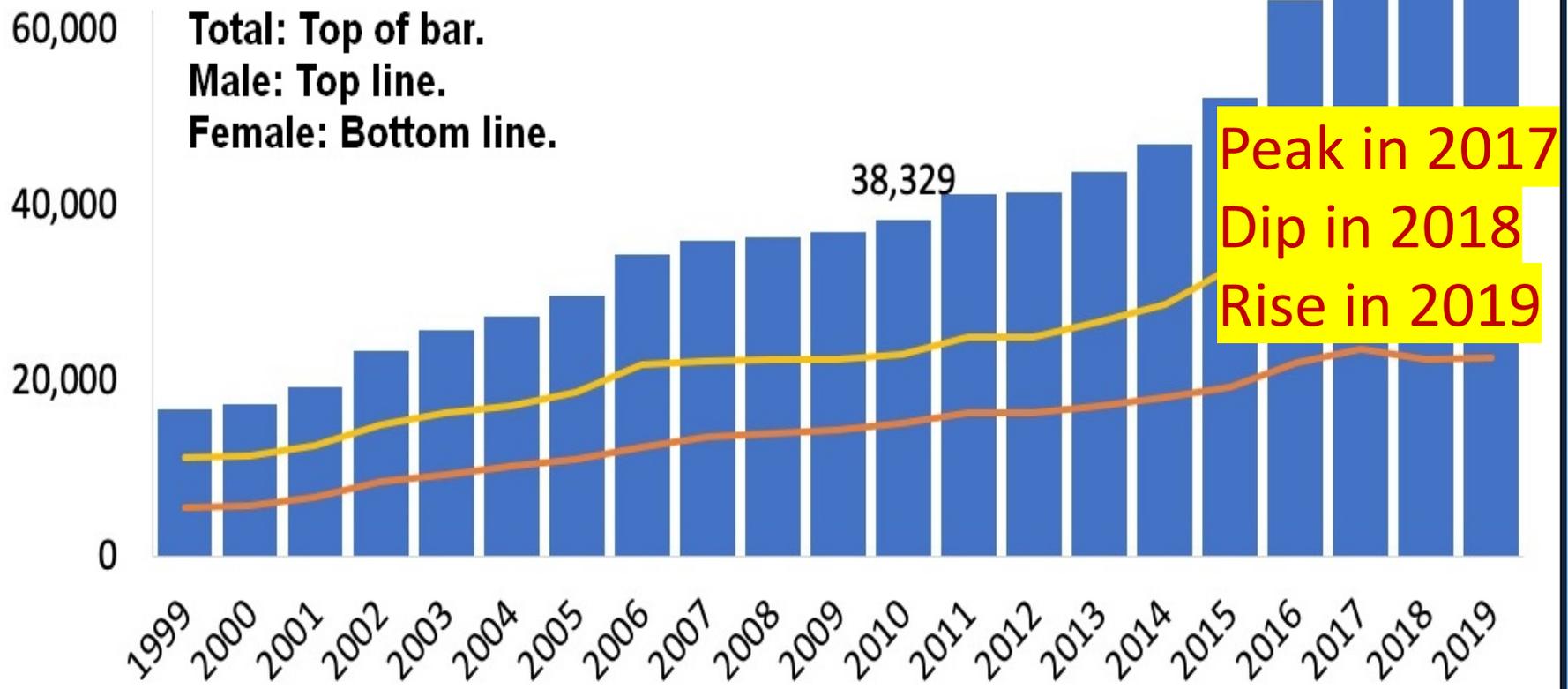
Rise and fall of Maine drug death numbers mirrors national trends

# Number of Fentanyl Deaths Compared with Number of all Drug Deaths



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 EST
Fentanyl deaths	1	32	97	193	247	217	259	336	490
All drug deaths	176	208	272	376	417	354	380	504	636

# USA. National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths. Number among all ages, by gender, 1999-2019.



# Percent of Drug Deaths due to Fentanyl

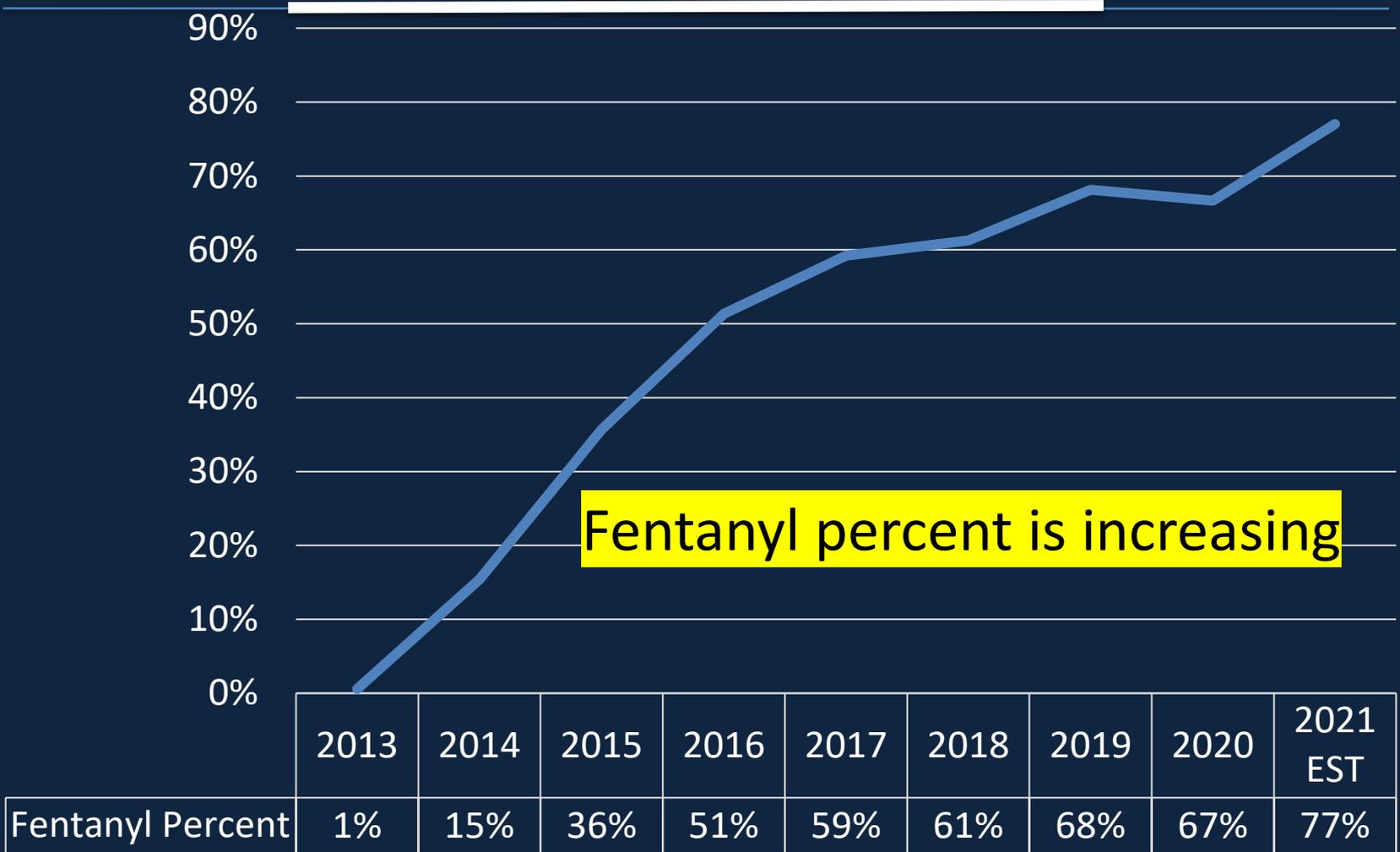
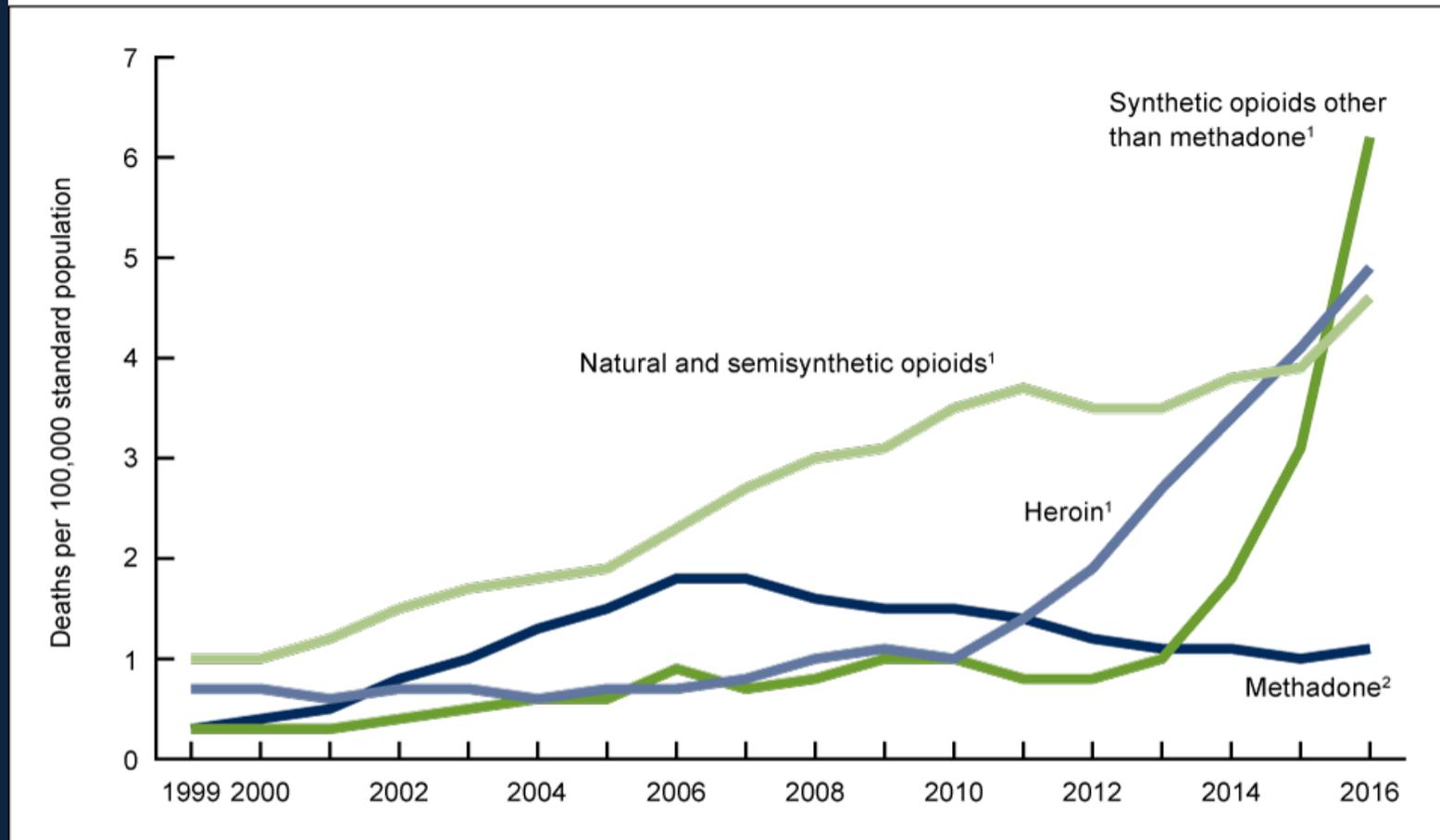


Figure 4. Age-adjusted drug overdose death rates, by opioid category: United States, 1999–2016



<sup>1</sup>Significant increasing trend from 1999 to 2016 with different rates of change over time,  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>2</sup>Significant increasing trend from 1999 to 2006, then decreasing trend from 2006 to 2016,  $p < 0.05$ .

NOTES: Deaths are classified using the *International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision*. Drug-poisoning (overdose) deaths are identified using underlying cause-of-death codes X40–X44, X60–X64, X85, and Y10–Y14. Drug overdose deaths involving selected drug categories are identified by specific multiple-cause-of-death codes: heroin, T40.1; natural and semisynthetic opioids, T40.2; methadone, T40.3; and synthetic opioids other than methadone, T40.4. Deaths involving more than one opioid category (e.g., a death involving both methadone and a natural or semisynthetic opioid) are counted in both categories. The percentage of drug overdose deaths that identified the specific drugs involved varied by year, with ranges of 75%–79% from 1999 to 2013, and 81%–85% from 2014 to 2016. Access data table for Figure 4 at: [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db294\\_table.pdf#4](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db294_table.pdf#4).

SOURCE: NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality.

# Fentanyl Supply

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Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid manufactured in China, and shipped to drug cartels in Mexico for distribution.

Easier to manufacture than to grow heroin.  
Smaller amounts to ship because much smaller amounts are needed for same opioid effect.

# *Overdose deaths*

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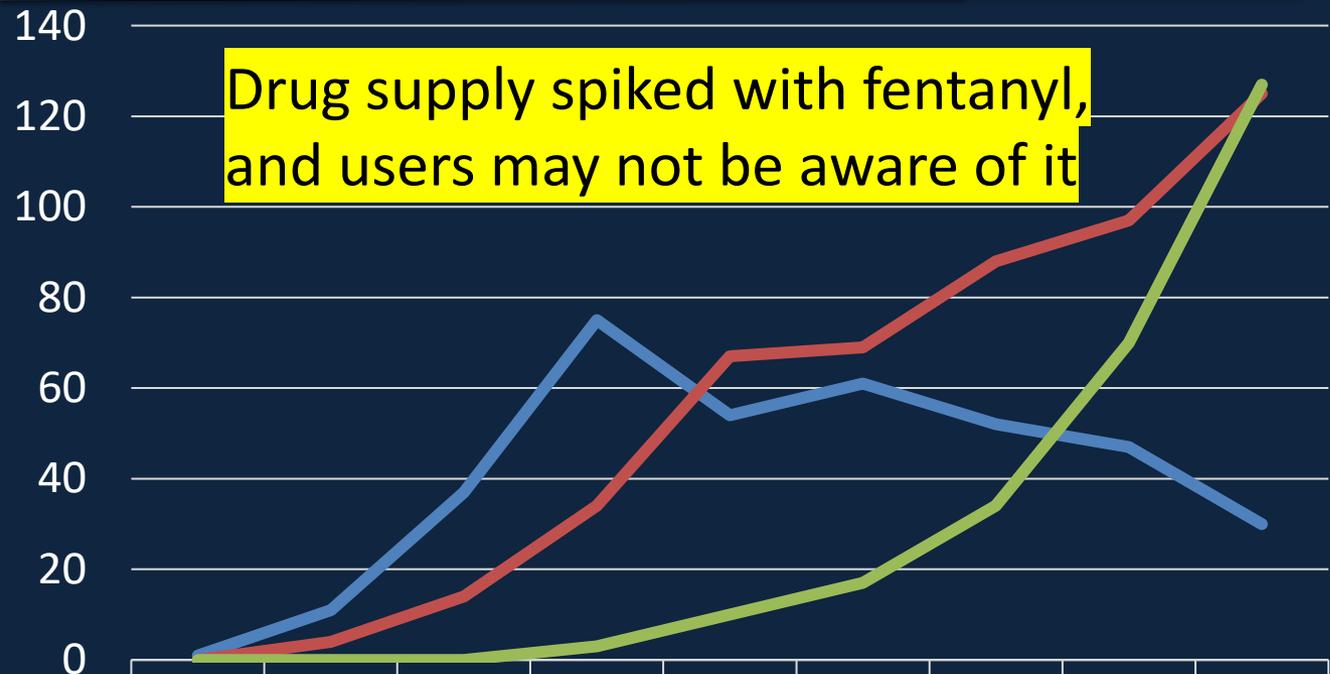
- Overdose deaths are not the best outcome measure of success or failure of state programs.
- Maine fentanyl supply rises and falls due largely to international drug trafficking, and 77% of the deaths are directly linked to fentanyl.

# *Additional Fentanyl Complications*

Overdose death toxicology reports in Maine show that fentanyl is being mixed with other potent illicit drugs, especially

- 46% with cocaine or methamphetamine, or both
- 16% with pharmaceutical opioids (most NOT prescribed)
- 10% with xylazine (new in 2021)

# Fentanyl Co-Intoxicants



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 EST
Fentanyl + Heroin	1	11	37	75	54	61	52	47	30
Fentanyl + Cocaine	0	4	14	34	67	69	88	97	125
Fentanyl + Meth	0	0	0	3	10	17	34	70	127

# Impacts of Pandemic on Overdoses Reported by Providers who also Distribute Naloxone

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- Reduced social supports: “all those safety nets are gone”
- Increased psychological stressors: “stress tolerance is lower”
- Reduced treatment access and changing modalities
  - Treatment work force is reduced
  - Marginalized populations don’t have access to phones and computers for telehealth services
- Isolation --reduced opportunity for bystanders to save lives
- Drug supply limitations –people taking more risky substances & may not be aware of contamination
- Public safety work force is reduced

(SOURCE: Armstrong 2022)

# Interventions to Prevent Fatal Overdoses

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## Keeping people alive until they get treatment

- Naloxone (Narcan)
- Increasing supply of naloxone in community
- Distribution to those who will be bystanders
- In 2021 Maine Naloxone Distribution Initiative distributed 77,480 doses Jan-Nov
- Get people into treatment –just one example
  - OPTIONS program referred 263 & distributed 909 doses of naloxone in their first program year.

# *Nonfatal Overdoses*

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- Deaths represent 7% of reported overdoses in 2021 January through November
- We are saving 93% of overdose victims
  - Nonfatal overdoses 8619
  - Fatal overdoses 578

# *January - November 2021*

Overdose Type	Number	Percent
Fatal	578	7%
EMS-Non Transport	2186	25%
Community Reversals	1876	22%
Law Enforcement/No EMS	12	<1%
Emergency Dept.	3967	46%

<b>TOTAL FATAL</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>TOTAL NONFATAL</b>	<b>8,041</b>	<b>93%</b>
<b>TOTAL OVERDOSES.</b>	<b>8,619</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Summary

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- Rising Maine overdose deaths are being driven by fentanyl lethality and international drug trafficking combined with effects of pandemic on drug using population.
- Maine has countered with strong naloxone distribution and emergency response, saving lives 93% of the time.