

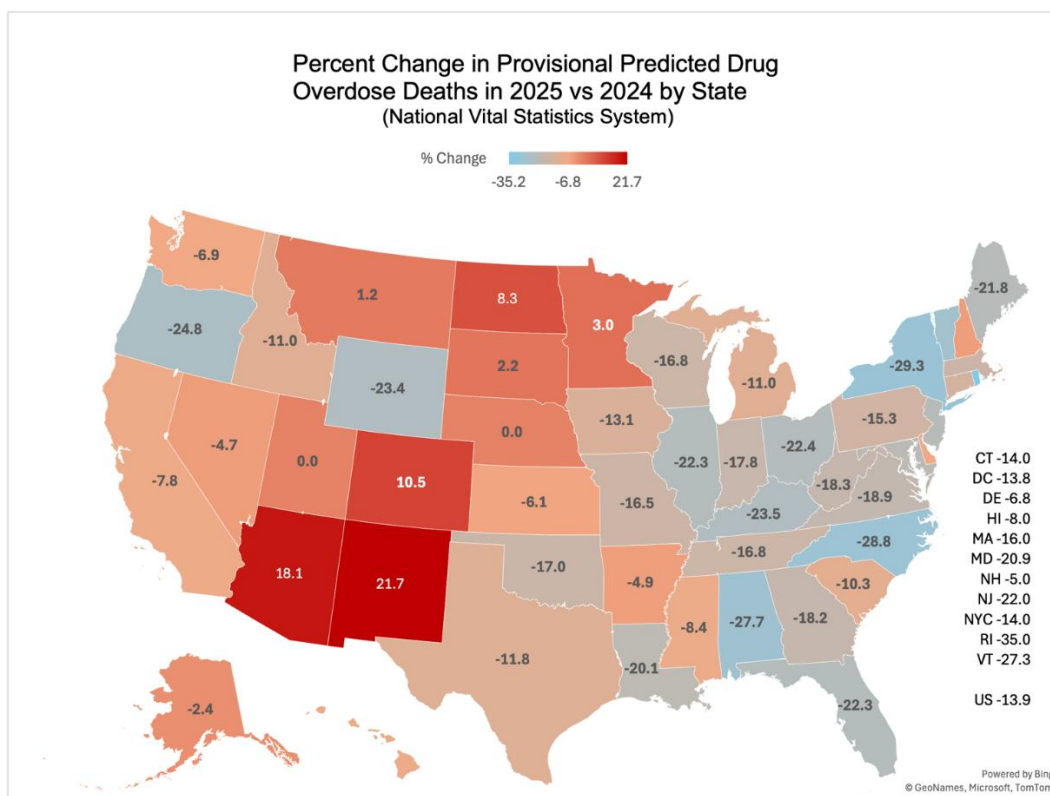
# AZPHA Special Report

## Third Consecutive Year of Declining Drug Overdose Deaths in the US; AZ Overdose Deaths Increase 18%

**By Allan Williams PhD, MPH**

On May 13, 2026, the [National Center for Health Statistics](#) released their annual provisional estimates of drug overdose deaths in the US. Drug deaths declined by 13.9% in 2025 vs 2024, the third consecutive year of decline. There were an estimated 69,973 US drug overdose deaths during 2025, compared to an estimated 81,313 in 2024. This was the lowest number since 2018. This followed a much larger decline in 2024 of 24.7%. Despite these declines, there was a drug overdose death on average every 7.5 minutes in the US in 2025.

While most states had declines, seven states had an increased number of estimated deaths in 2025. The largest increases were in Arizona (18.1%) and New Mexico (21.7%).



Declines in US estimated deaths were evident for all drug categories (except methadone). Categories are not mutually exclusive since multiple drugs are typically found in overdose deaths. So a drug death may be counted in more than one category.

Drug Class	US 2024 Deaths	US 2025 Deaths	Percent Change
Cocaine (T40.5)	22,397	19,581	-12.6%
Psychostimulants w/abuse potential (T43.6)*	29,852	26,181	-12.3%
Heroin (T40.1)	2,808	2,050	-27.0%
Methadone (T40.3)	3,285	3,519	7.1%
Natural & semi-synthetic opioids (T40.2)**	8,082	7,065	-12.6%
Synthetic opioids excl. methadone (T40.4)***	48,913	38,084	-22.1%
Total Opioids (T40.0-T40.4, T40.6)	55,296	44,564	-19.4%
All Drug Overdose (X40-X44, X60- X64, X85, & Y10-Y14)	<b>81,313</b>	<b>69,973</b>	-13.9%

\*Includes methamphetamine; \*\*Morphine, oxycodone, etc., \*\*\*Primarily fentanyl

## AZ Overdose Deaths Increased in '25 After Declining in '24

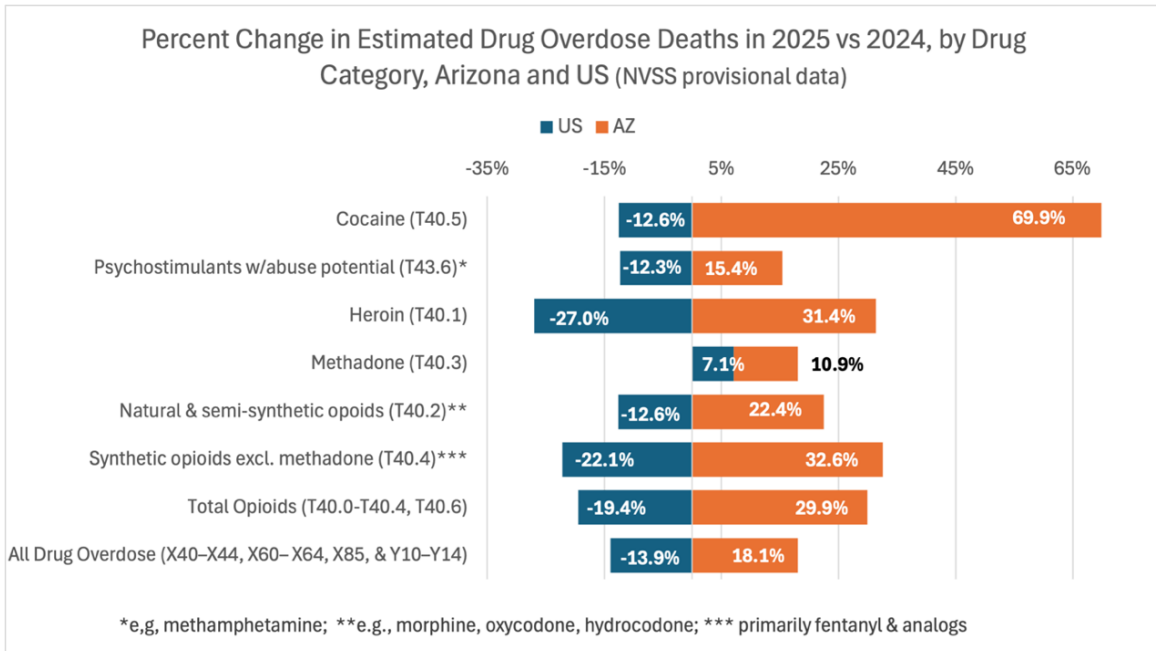
While US deaths declined for all drug categories (except methadone), Arizona drug deaths increased in 2025 for all drug categories. Again, categories are not mutually exclusive.

Drug Class	AZ 2024 Deaths	AZ 2025 Deaths	Percent Change
Cocaine (T40.5)	256	435	69.9%
Psychostimulants w/abuse potential (T43.6)*	1,545	1,783	15.4%
Heroin (T40.1)	35	46	31.4%
Methadone (T40.3)	119	132	10.9%
Natural & semi-synthetic opioids (T40.2)**	205	251	22.4%
Synthetic opioids excl. methadone (T40.4)***	1,525	2,022	32.6%
Total Opioids (T40.0-T40.4, T40.6)	1,727	2,244	29.9%
All Drug Overdose (X40-X44, X60- X64, X85, & Y10-Y14)	<b>2,531</b>	<b>2,988</b>	18.1%

\*Includes methamphetamine; \*\*Morphine, oxycodone, etc.; \*\*\*Primarily fentanyl

Below is a graphical comparison of the percent increases or decreases Arizona and US drug deaths in 2025 vs 2024 by drug category. Arizona did experience declines of deaths in 2024 of 16.9% for synthetic opioids (fentanyl), 14.0% for total opioids, and 6.9% for drug overdose deaths overall. Psychostimulant deaths in 2024 increased by 6.8% while cocaine deaths increased by 1.6%.

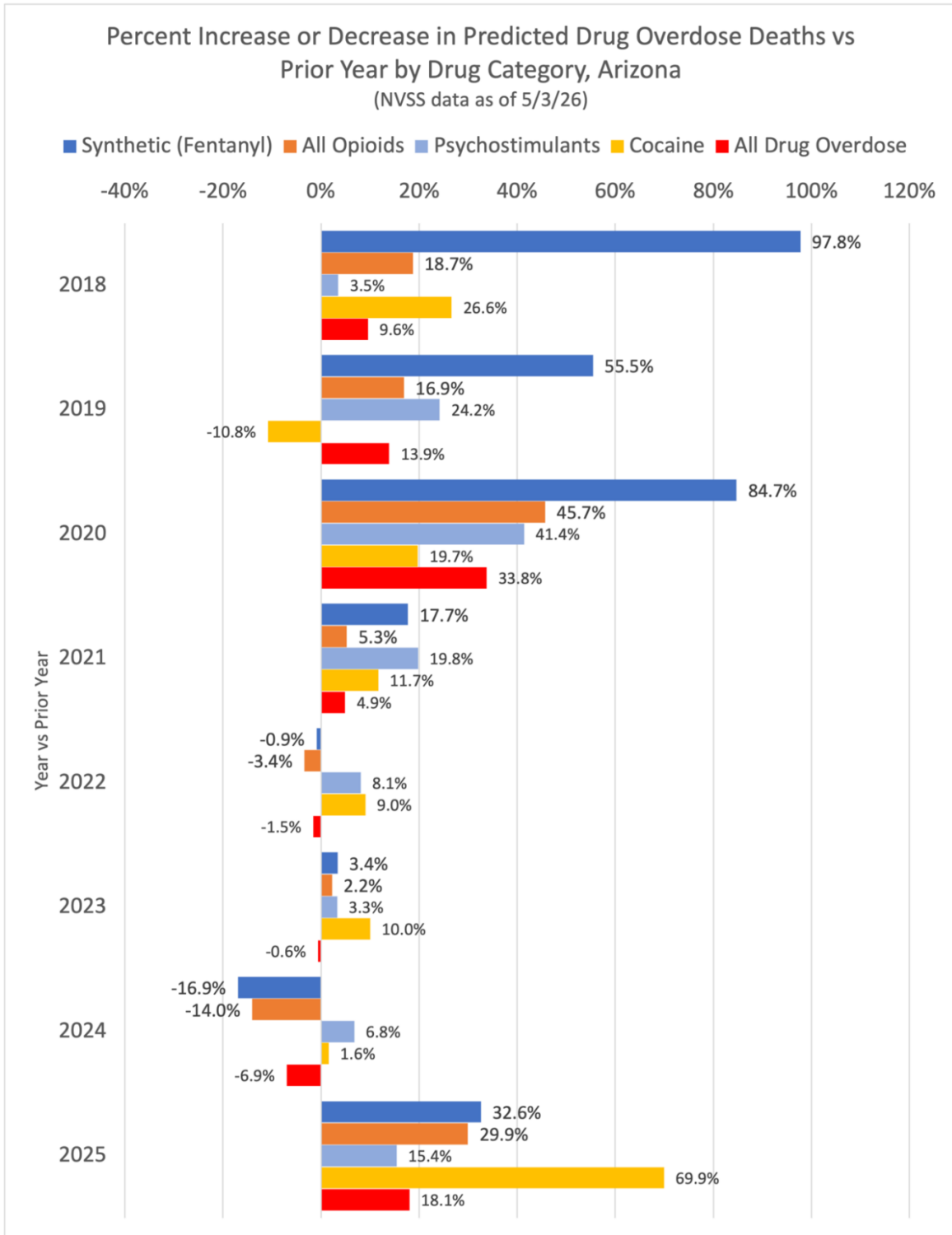
Here's a summary chart of the year to year changes in drug overdose death in Arizona by drug category.



## Possible Contributors to the US Decline

Multiple media reports (e.g., [WashPost](#), [WashPost](#), [KFF](#), [WSJ](#), [Guardian](#), [NPR](#), [AP](#), [AP](#), [Reuters](#)) as well as several published journal articles (e.g., [Busch, 2025](#), [Dowell, 2025](#), [Post, 2025](#), [Anderer, 2026](#), [Stringfellow, 2026](#), [Fischer, 2026](#)) have suggested a variety of factors that may have contributed to the declines in US overdose deaths during the past several years. Here are the most frequently cited factors in no particular order.

- Increased legalization (45 states) and use of fentanyl test strips (although the Trump Administration has apparently [notified grant recipients](#) that they would no longer fund test strips).
- Increased use and [access to naloxone](#)
- Reduced potency of fentanyl
- Impacts of the opioid settlement funds and access to treatment programs
- Increased drug seizures
- Reduced use of opioids for pain after surgical procedures
- Restrictions on exports of fentanyl precursor chemicals from China



While there can be some relief that drug overdose have declined over the past three years, primarily driven by the decline in opioid deaths, changes in policy and the introduction of new illicit and dangerous drugs such as xylazine (a horse sedative

frequently mixed with fentanyl) and nitazenes (a synthetic opioid) will require continued preventative efforts.

## Conclusion

The continued national decline in overdose deaths is encouraging and suggests that public health strategies such as expanded naloxone access, harm-reduction services, prevention efforts and improved access to treatment are making a difference.

But Arizona's sharp increase in overdose deaths is a warning that progress is neither automatic nor evenly distributed. With nearly 3,000 Arizonans dying from drug overdoses in 2025 (including substantial increases in deaths involving fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine) this is not the time to scale back proven interventions.

Arizona should strengthen access to naloxone, fentanyl test strips and other harm-reduction tools; expand timely access to evidence-based treatment for substance-use disorders; and use opioid-settlement funds for programs with measurable results.

The state should also improve its ability to identify emerging threats and respond quickly as the illicit drug supply changes. Overdose deaths are preventable. The national trend shows that sustained public health action can save lives, but Arizona's experience shows the cost of losing ground.

### **Note on NVSS Methodology:**

The death data presented in the [NVSS website](#) includes both "Reported" deaths and "Predicted" (estimated) deaths. The reported deaths are those deaths reported on death certificates submitted by states. However, in contrast to the data in CDC's publicly-accessible data systems (CDC WONDER and WISQARS) which are not changed after the data is classified as final, NVSS internal data sets continue to be updated as additional data become available.

Drug-related deaths frequently have longer delays in determining and reporting the final causes of death. Consequently those death counts will vary from the fixed final datasets that are publicly available. For example, 2024 WONDER final data for opioid deaths in Arizona shows 1,684 resident deaths and 1,690 deaths among both residents and non-resident deaths. The NVSS reported deaths were 1,727.

The 2025 deaths are provisional and still subject to change. The reported deaths were those as of May 3, 2026. Since 2025 data is not complete, the annual predicted deaths are estimated based on previous experience and adjustments for delayed reporting. This varies by state. The predicted opioid deaths in Arizona in 2025 was 2,244 while CDC Wonder provisional data indicated 1,960 resident deaths as of 5/24/26. The full report includes a more complete description of methods.