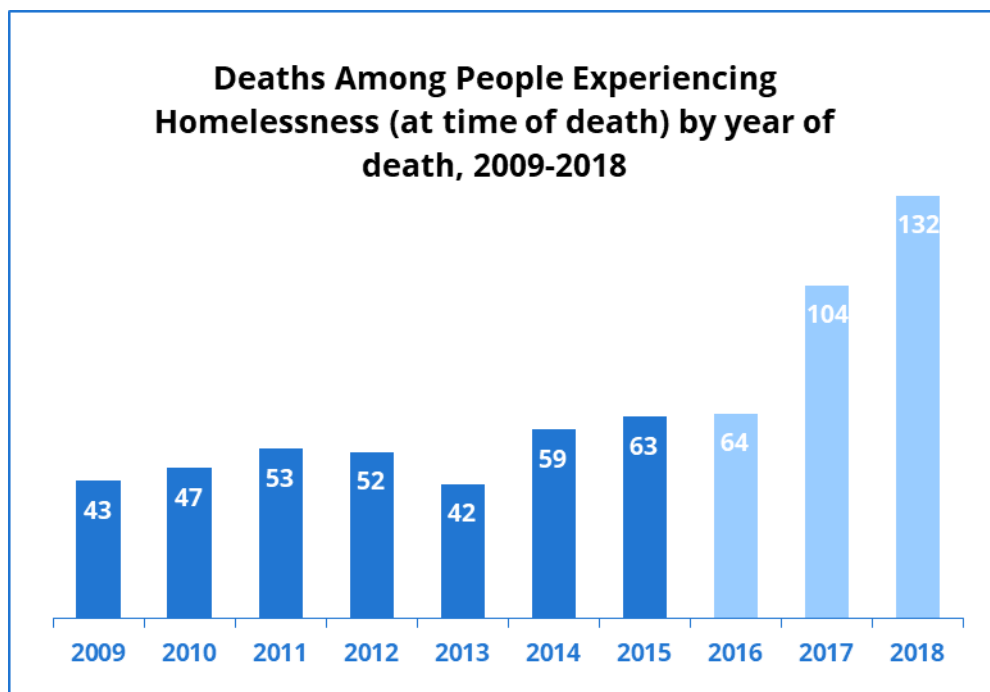




Deaths among people experiencing homelessness

Homelessness is a longstanding problem in Philadelphia that impacts individuals' physical and mental health. In 2019, there were 4,762 sheltered people experiencing homelessness and an additional 973 individuals living without shelter in Philadelphia.¹ People experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to disease complications and mortality than those who have a home. Also, many medical and behavioral health conditions are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness, including hypertension, diabetes, and substance use disorders. All of this leads to a significantly decreased life expectancy for people experiencing homelessness as compared to the overall population. This issue of CHART describes trends in deaths among people experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia through 2018.

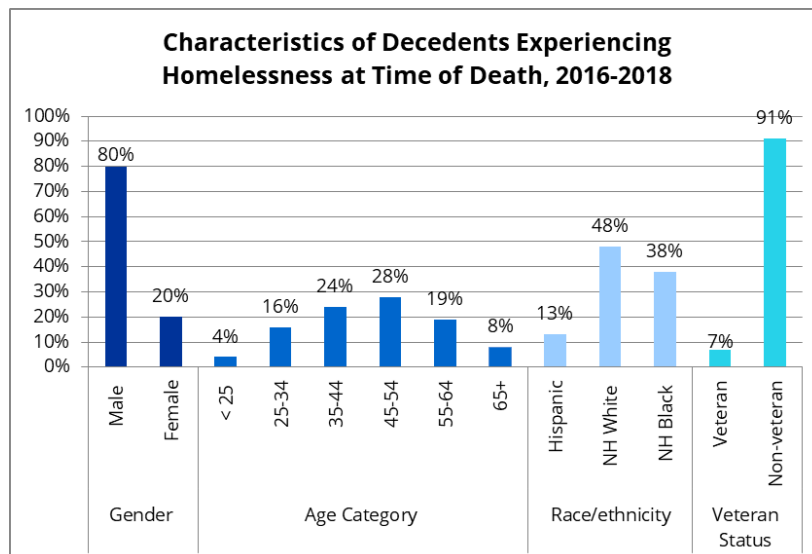
Deaths among people experiencing homelessness have tripled, largely due to the opioid epidemic



- Deaths among people currently experiencing homelessness have increased from 2009 to 2018, more than 3-fold.
- This increase corresponds with an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered, largely related to the opioid epidemic.

Source: Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office, 2009-2018

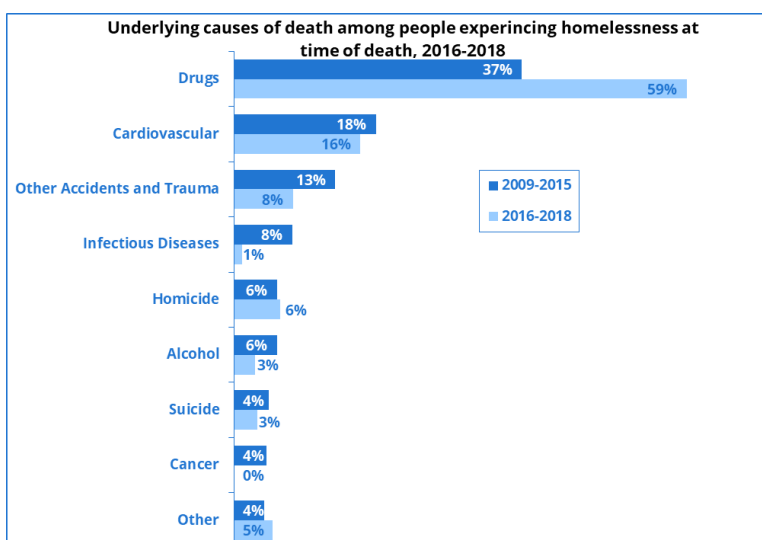
Decedents who were experiencing homelessness at death were more likely to be male, age 45 or older, and white



- About 80 percent of the decedents between 2016 and 2018 were male.
- More than half of the decedents were 45 years and older.
- 48 percent of decedents were non-Hispanic white, 38 percent were non-Hispanic Black, and 13 percent were Hispanic/Latino.
- 7 percent of the decedents from 2016 to 2018 were veterans, a decrease from 14% during 2009 to 2015.

Source: Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office, 2016-2018

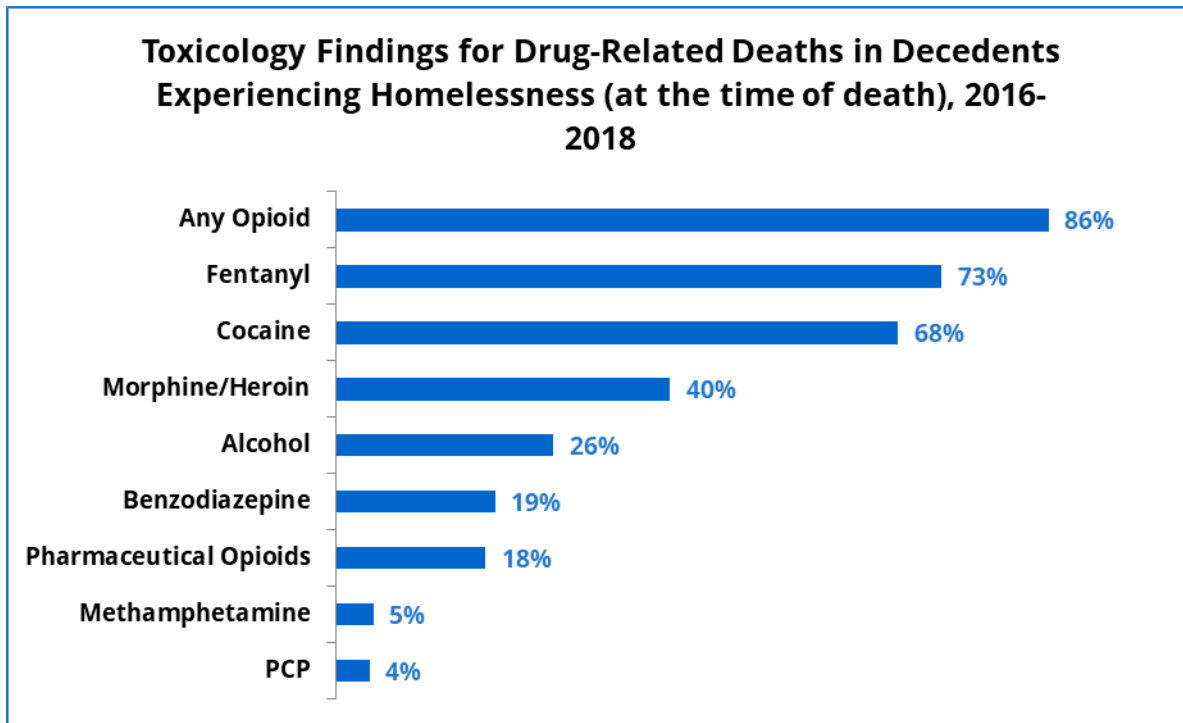
Drug-related deaths account for nearly 60 percent of deaths among people experiencing homelessness



- The leading underlying cause of death among people experiencing homelessness during 2016 to 2018 was drug-related deaths (59%), followed by cardiovascular disease (16%) and other accidents/trauma (8%).
- Drug-related deaths increased from 37% in 2009 to 2015 to 59% in 2016 to 2018. The increase in deaths over the last decade among people experiencing homelessness can be mostly attributed to this increase in drug-related deaths.

Source: Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office, 2009-2018

Nearly 3 in 4 drug-related deaths among persons experiencing homelessness Involved the illegal opioid fentanyl



*more than one substance can be present in the toxicology results for a decedent

- Among 171 drug-related deaths in people experiencing homeless at the time of death in 2016 through 2018, 86 percent had detectable levels of any type of opioid, most (73%) had fentanyl.

Source: Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office, 2016– 2018

What can be done

The City of Philadelphia has:

- Increased availability of low barrier shelter beds in areas hardest hit by the opioid crisis.
- Increased the number of treatment beds.
- Distributed naloxone, the overdose reversing drug commonly known as Narcan, to organizations serving people experiencing homelessness, including local faith-based groups.
- Recognizing that providing homes ends homelessness, increased the City's permanent supportive housing supply by about 400 units since 2016, ensuring more people with serious challenges like chronic homelessness and opioid use disorder can access the stability of a home.
- Increased public awareness and education through community meetings and citywide public service announcement campaigns about opioids and treatment.
- Increased the availability of treatment on demand.
- Empaneled the Mayor's Task Force to Combat the Opioid Epidemic.
- Launched the Philadelphia Resilience Project, the City's unified response to America's nationwide opioid crisis.
- Dedicated over \$40 million in new funding for programs to build on or sustain work started through the Philadelphia Resilience Project, which includes about \$30 million to the Office of Homeless Services.

Health care providers can:

- Screen patients for housing insecurity and coordinate with services to address housing insecurity and homelessness
- Develop medical respite programs for patients experiencing homelessness
- Help patients experiencing homelessness who are dependent on opioids receive medication-assisted treatment. This can be through referral to substance use treatment providers or by prescribing buprenorphine
- Implement "warm handoffs" to treatment for persons who are experiencing homelessness and had a non-fatal overdose

People can:

- Call the 24/7 Homeless Outreach hotline at 215-232-1984 if they see someone who is homeless or sleeping on the street

Resources

- Philadelphia [Office of Homeless Services](#)
- [City resources and data on the opioid epidemic](#)
- Philadelphia Homeless Outreach 24/7, 365 — 215-232-1984
- Harm reduction resources including naloxone distribution and referral to medication-assisted treatment through [Prevention Point of Philadelphia](#) — 215-634-5272

References

Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services. (2019). 2019 Point in Time Count Philadelphia Continuum of Care. Retrieved from: <http://philadelphiaofficeofhomelesservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Total-by-Household-Type.pdf>

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