

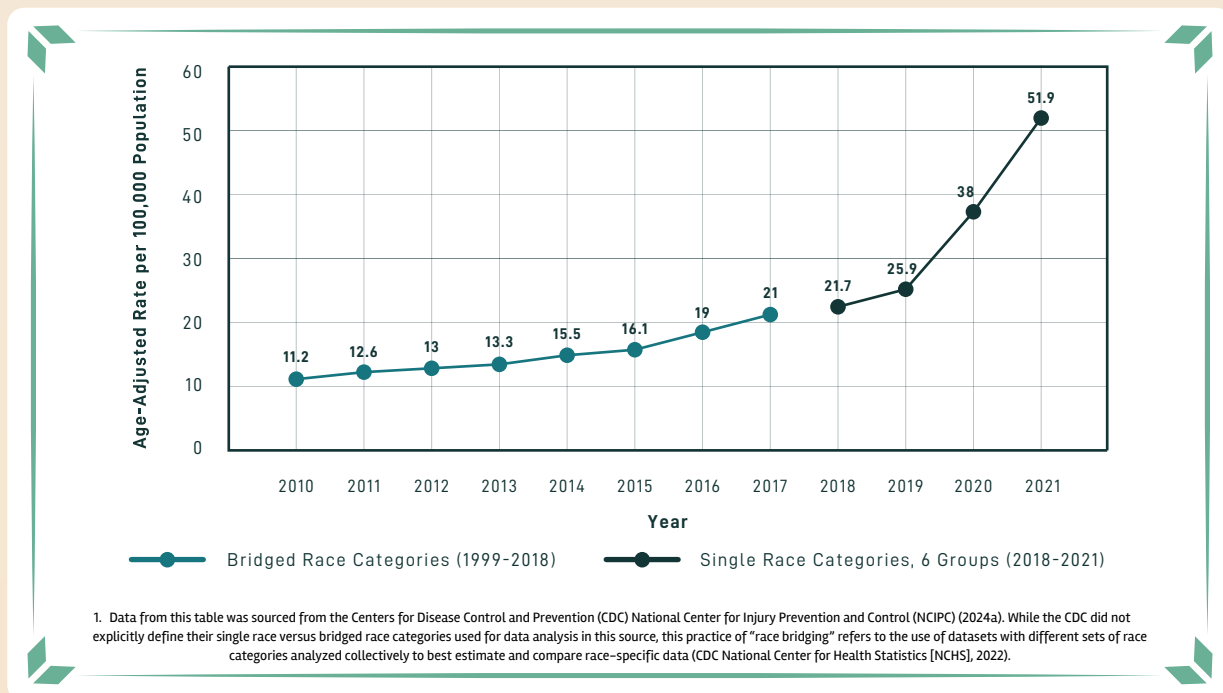
# American Indian and Alaska Native OPIOID OVERDOSES

## BACKGROUND

Between 1999 and 2022, drug overdoses in the United States increased by over 500 percent, with approximately 296 overdose deaths occurring each day in 2022 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). Over 75 percent of these overdose deaths in 2022 involved an opioid (2024). Opioids are a classification of drugs that are used to reduce pain, and opioid drugs are made from chemicals that interact with opioid receptors on nerve cells in the body and brain to reduce the intensity of pain signals and feelings of pain (CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control [NCIPC], 2024b). Opioid drugs can include illegal drugs like heroin and fentanyl, as well as legal prescription pain medications like oxycodone or hydrocodone (2024b). Problematic patterns of opioid use that cause significant impairment or distress can lead to Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) (2024b). An opioid overdose can occur when an opioid drug is taken in excessive amounts, and these overdoses can be fatal or non-fatal (2024b).

As shown below in **Figure 1**, for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations, the rate of opioid overdose deaths quadrupled between 2011 to 2021, increasing from 12.6 deaths per 100,000 people to 51.9 per 100,000, respectively (CDC NCIPC, 2024a). The AI/AN population also had the highest rate of fatal opioid overdoses in 2021 compared to all other racial/ethnic groups in the United States (2024a). For fatal overdoses overall, disparities also exist between urban and rural communities, particularly for AI/AN populations (Hirschak et al., 2023). In 2017, the rate of AI/AN fatal overdoses was 22.1 per 100,000 among urban populations, compared to 19.8 per 100,000 among rural populations (2023).

**Figure 1. Overdose Deaths Involving Opioids Among American Indian and Alaska Native People, U.S. 2010–2021<sup>1</sup>**



# OVERDOSE PREVENTION RESOURCES FOR AI/AN COMMUNITIES

Between 2023–2024, the National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) conducted an opioid needs assessment to better understand how overdose disparities affect urban AI/AN communities. To learn more about the findings from this needs assessment, visit NCUIH's [Overdose Prevention Resource Hub](https://ncuih.org/overdoseprevention) at <https://ncuih.org/overdoseprevention>. Additional examples of resources for overdose prevention are linked below.

- ▶ [2022 CDC Clinical Practice Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Pain](#)
- ▶ [CDC Overdose Prevention Education and Learning Hub](#)
- ▶ [CDC Overdose Prevention Resources for Public Health Professionals](#)
- ▶ [CDC Overdose Prevention Trainings for Health Care Professionals](#)
- ▶ [CDC Overdose Resource Exchange \(ORE\)](#)
- ▶ [IHS Opioids Data](#)
- ▶ [Indian Country ECHO – Harm Reduction](#)
- ▶ [Indian Country ECHO – SUD Resource Hub](#)
- ▶ [National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#)
- ▶ [National Harm Reduction Coalition Native Harm Reduction Toolkit](#)
- ▶ [NCUIH Behavioral Health Resources](#)
- ▶ [NCUIH Hope for Life Day Toolkit](#)
- ▶ [NIHB Tribal Opioid Response Resource Toolkit](#)
- ▶ [NPAIHB Opioid Use Disorder Resources](#)
- ▶ [SAMHSA Opioid Misuse in Indian Country Fact Sheet](#)
- ▶ [SAMHSA Recovery Resources for American Indian and Alaska Natives](#)
- ▶ [SAMHSA Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center Resources on Substance Use Disorders](#)
- ▶ [TACUNA Project](#)
- ▶ [We R Native Substance Misuse Resources](#)
- ▶ [Zero Suicide Toolkit: “Best and Promising Practices for the Implementation of Zero Suicide in Indian Country”](#)

## REFERENCES

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