

# Victorian fatal overdoses reach 10-year high

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A new report from the Coroners Court of Victoria shows that the state recorded its highest number of fatal overdoses in a decade in 2024.

The report, *Victorian Overdose Deaths 2015–2024*, is the first release of 2024 full year overdose data and reveals 584 Victorians died from overdose last year, compared to 547 in 2023 and 552 in 2022.

The report also shows that between 2015 and 2024 the overdose death rate persistently remained at around 8.1 deaths per 100,000 people on average in Victoria each year and varied only slightly from this average in any particular year. As with previous years, most Victorian overdose deaths in 2024 (73.5%) involved multiple drugs.

A significant finding in the 2024 data was the continuing rise of illegal drug involvement in Victorian overdose deaths. Ten years ago, illegal drugs contributed to just under half of Victorian overdose deaths. By contrast, in 2024 illegal drugs contributed to 65.6% of Victorian overdose deaths, up from 58.9% in 2023 and 54.9% in 2022. Several illegal drugs, notably heroin, methamphetamine, MDMA, cocaine and GHB, reached a 10-year high in the number of overdose deaths to which they contributed.

Meanwhile, the proportion of Victorian overdose deaths involving pharmaceutical drugs continued to gradually decline, accounting for 69.3% of overdose deaths in 2024, down from 78% in 2015. The proportion of overdose deaths involving alcohol was reasonably consistent with previous years, at 24.1% in 2024.

Other key findings in the report include:

- Men are on average twice as likely as women to die from overdose, and people aged between 35 and 54 are most at risk.
- Metropolitan Melbourne accounts for approximately three-quarters of overdose deaths.
- In 2024, the five top contributing drugs to Victorian overdose deaths were heroin (248 deaths), diazepam (219 deaths), methamphetamine (215 deaths), alcohol (141 deaths) and pregabalin (92 deaths).
- The annual number of methamphetamine-involved overdose deaths in Victoria more than tripled between 2015 (76 deaths) and 2024 (215 deaths). There was a 30% jump in methamphetamine-involved overdose deaths between 2023 (164 deaths) and 2024.
- In 2024, heroin-involved overdose deaths increased with 248 deaths, compared to 204 in 2023. Across the 10-year period, the annual number of heroin-involved overdose deaths varied substantially from year to year within local government areas, except for Yarra, where heroin-involved overdose deaths were consistently elevated.

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- There were 48 overdose deaths involving new psychoactive substances (NPS) in 2024, which was comparable to the 41 deaths in 2023 and 48 in 2022. The number of NPS-involved overdose deaths appears to have plateaued in recent years, after steadily increasing between 2017 and 2022.
- Despite this apparent plateau, NPS remain a closely monitored concern for at least two reasons. First, because they include particularly risky drugs such as nitazenes, which are a group of (mostly) very potent opioids that can be up to 1000 times or more stronger than morphine. Second, because NPS evolve so rapidly: in the decade between 2015 and 2024, 59 different individual NPS were identified as contributors to overdose deaths in Victoria, but most NPS only contributed in one or two deaths before not being seen again.
- In 2024 some local government areas experienced levels of overdose deaths that were substantially higher than any other year in the previous decade. Particular stand-outs were Greater Geelong (35 overdose deaths in 2024), Hume (22 deaths) and Melbourne (42 deaths).
- Most Victorian overdose deaths across the decade were accidental or unintentional (74.5%) rather than suicides (19.3%) or deaths where the deceased's intent could not be determined (6.2%). However, some important variations in deceased intent were observed. For example, among males only 13% of overdose deaths were suicides, whereas among females the proportion was 31.4%.

In Victoria, all deaths from suspected non-natural causes, including suspected overdoses, are required to be reported to the Coroners Court of Victoria. Suspected overdoses are recorded by the Court in the Victorian Overdose Deaths Register (VODR), which is the data source for this report.

Victoria's coroners regularly make use of the overdose deaths data to develop prevention-focused insights into issues as diverse as how doctors coordinate patient care; the regulation of certain prescription drugs; and the need for greater awareness around emerging illegal drugs.

The Court also shares data from the VODR with government and health agencies to inform their work in reducing drug-harms.

### **Quotes from the Victorian State Coroner, Judge John Cain:**

*"Overdose deaths occur all across Victoria and no community escapes their impact — ensuring that Victorians can access supports, treatment and education is vital."*

*"We have seen some genuine progress in harm reduction initiatives recently, including the commencement of Victoria's drug checking trial."*

*"However, the concerning rise in overdose deaths and especially those involving illegal drugs is a stark reminder that we need to keep building on our harm reduction efforts."*

Access the report here: <https://coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/victorian-overdose-deaths-2015-2024>

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