

2023 Annual Opioid Report

March 2024



new orleans

health
department

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DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS IN NEW ORLEANS PARISH 2023

In the Greater New Orleans Area, drug overdose deaths continue to contribute to premature mortality, and for the past several years, the number of fatalities attributed to overdose in Orleans Parish have persistently reached record highs. The New Orleans Coroner's Office reported 499 and 492 accidental drug-related deaths in 2022 and 2021, respectively, with fentanyl detected in 89 percent of deaths in 2022.¹ And while 2022 was one of the most violent years in recent history, with the city of New Orleans recording 265 murders, there were still nearly twice as many overdose deaths as homicides in the same period.²

In 2023, the New Orleans Health Department (NOHD) and community partners attempted to address the overdose crisis through multiple approaches. This report will provide detailed and relative data regarding these approaches, which include ramping up Narcan distribution efforts, expanding access to Narcan and other harm reduction supplies, addressing needle litter in the community, and implementing local policy changes to help reduce the negative impacts associated with drug use. Additionally, Orleans Parish is set to receive approximately \$18 million over the next 18 years in Opioid Settlement Funds as a result of national lawsuits. This report will expand on some of the ways the City plans to use those funds in opioid-related activities for 2024.

¹ City of New Orleans. New Orleans Coroner. (2023). 2022 Coroner's Report on Accidental Drug-Related Deaths in New Orleans

² Nola.com. (2023, January 5). New Orleans Murders: See map of killings and neighborhood totals for 2023. https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/new-orleans-murders-in-2023-map-stats-by-neighborhood/article_82b8f908-8bd9-11ed-901e-274373cf0c47.html

NOHD AND COMMUNITY PARTNER NARCAN DISTRIBUTION EFFORTS

The New Orleans Health Department has ramped up efforts to ensure that Narcan, the overdose reversal medication, is available to anyone who wants it via overdose response trainings, community outreach, and providing Narcan to partner agencies.

NOHD Overdose Response Trainings

Although the Health Department has been offering Overdose Response trainings for a number of years, a Community Outreach and Education Coordinator was hired in late 2020 to expand access to those trainings to interested community groups and individuals. The training helps individuals recognize when someone may be experiencing a drug overdose and how to administer the life-saving medication naloxone. Table 1 shows the number of trainings conducted by year, the number of individuals trained, and the amount of naloxone/Narcan provided to trainees.

Table 1
Number of NOHD Overdose Response Trainings, 2021-2023

Year	Number of Trainings Conducted	Number of Individuals Trained	Number of Narcan Doses Distributed
2021	25	225	277
2022	63	731	1,083
2023	75	1,392	2,868
Total	163	2,348	4,228

Overdose Response Trainings By Community Partners

Local agencies participating in NOHD's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) identified a need to expand harm reduction and overdose response trainings. In an effort to do so, CHIP partners from the Louisiana Department of Health, CrescentCare, Odyssey House Louisiana, and Trystereo New Orleans collaborated to develop a standardized curriculum for agencies new to overdose response trainings to refer to when developing their own training materials. In addition, CHIP members established a train-the-trainer program in the summer of 2023 for any individuals interested in facilitating overdose response trainings of their own. The goal of the train-the-trainer program is to create a network of trainers around the Greater New Orleans area who are providing content developed by experts in harm reduction to ensure consistent information is dispersed throughout the city. The first of these train-the-trainer sessions was held in the fall of 2023 and resulted in four certified overdose response trainers. The CHIP working group plans to expand these trainings to specific populations, such as hospitality workers, in 2024.

Narcan Street Outreach

In addition to overdose response trainings, NOHD distributes Narcan throughout the community via regular outreach, using overdose data provided by New Orleans Emergency Medical Services (NOEMS) and the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program (ODMAP) to help inform outreach locations. These outreach events provide community members with a quick, on-the-street introduction to overdose response including how to identify an overdose and administer NOHD-provided naloxone. NOHD kits include two doses of nasal-spray Narcan, instructions on how to use it, a community resource guide outlining where people with substance use disorder can access treatment, and a phone number for individuals to call should they want or need more Narcan. In 2023, NOHD provided 588 kits (1,176 doses) of Narcan. Figure 2 illustrates where NOEMS responded to calls that required Narcan administration, and Figure 3 illustrates where NOHD distributed its Narcan through its community outreach efforts.

Figure 2
New Orleans EMS Narcan Administration Heat Map, 2023

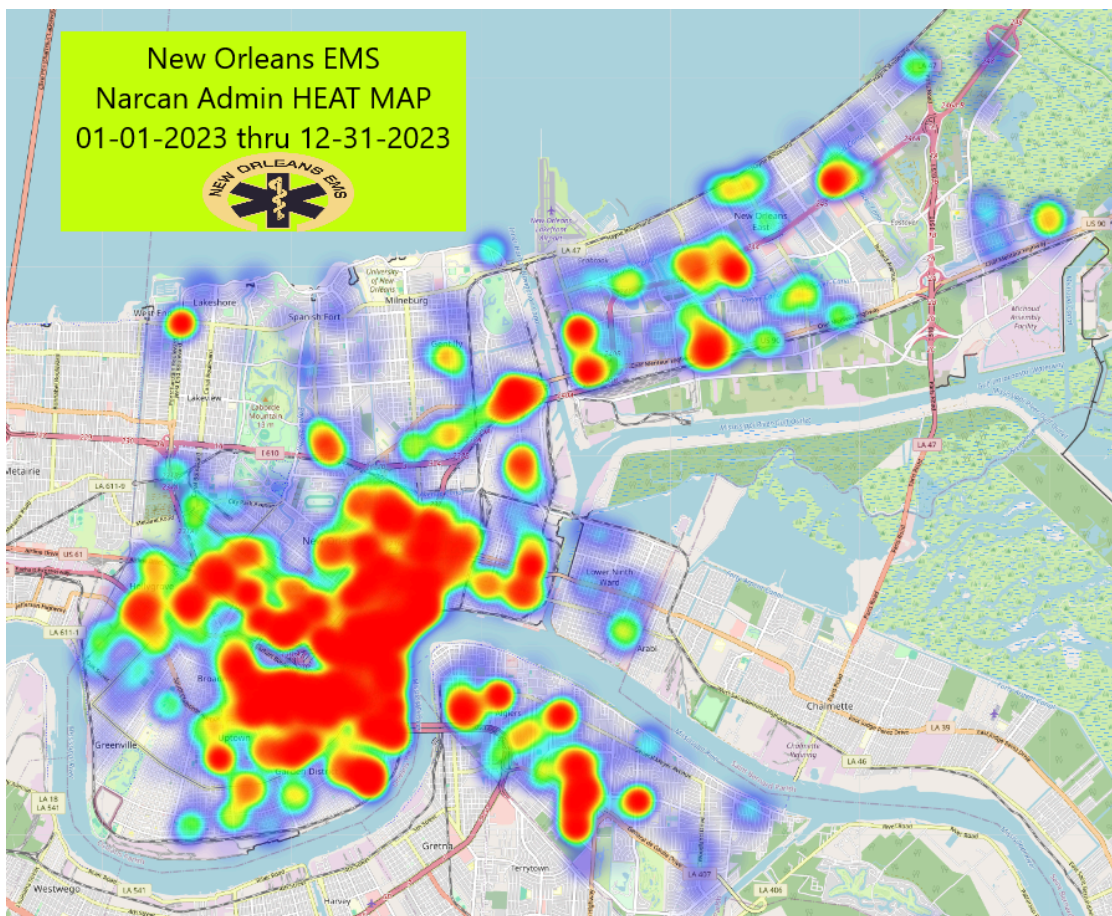
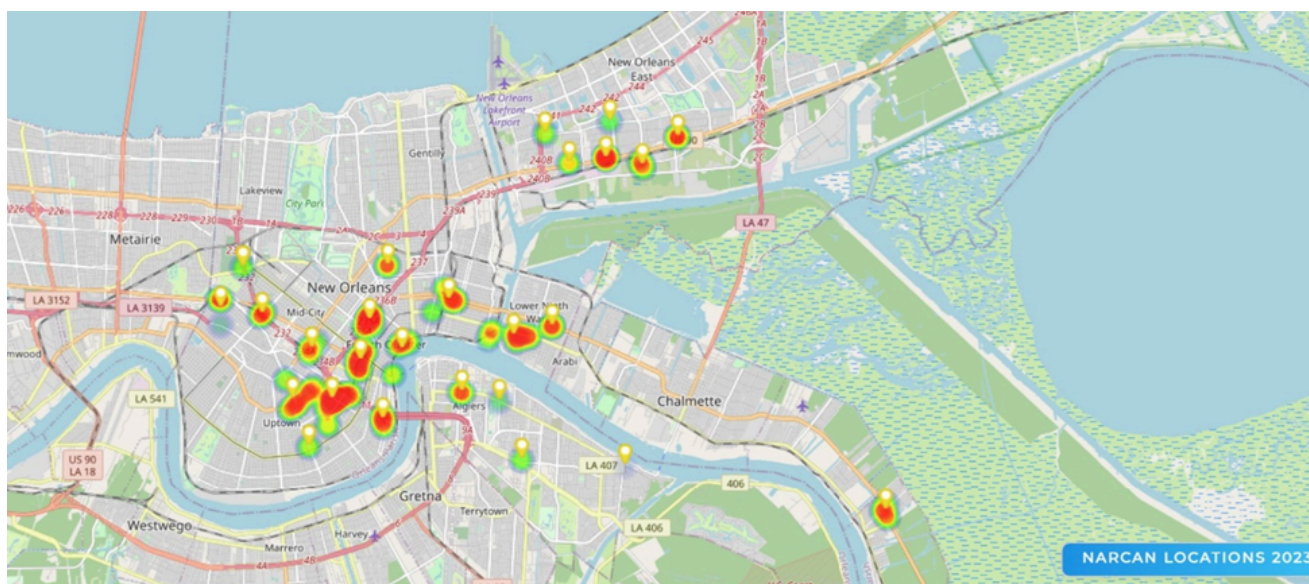


Figure 3
New Orleans Health Department Outreach Heat Map, 2023



Providing Narcan to Community Partners

To further increase community access to Narcan, NOHD also provides Narcan to agencies and organizations throughout New Orleans who then pass it on to individuals who need it. In 2023, NOHD provided 760 doses of Narcan to organizations serving various groups, including:

- Healthcare for the Homeless
- Low Barrier Shelter
- NAMI New Orleans
- New Orleans Mission
- New Orleans Musician's Clinic
- The Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness
- The Office of Homeless Services and Strategy
- The Office of Nighttime Economy
- Ozanam Inn
- Southern Solidarity

These organizations act as trusted messengers to distribute Narcan to harder-to-reach populations.

NOHD also provided NOEMS with “Leave Behind Kits,” containing two doses of Narcan and a substance use resource guide, to be given to individuals who refuse transport to the hospital after experiencing an overdose. In 2023, NOEMS distributed 125 Leave Behind Kits.

In addition to these distribution points, the New Orleans Fire Department (NOFD) continues to provide free Narcan to community members at the four stations listed below.

Station #1: 2920 Magazine Street

Station #29: 317 Decatur Street

Station #36: 5403 Read Boulevard

Station #40: 2500 General De Gaulle Drive

NARCAN DISTRIBUTION OUTCOMES

Since increasing Narcan distribution activities, New Orleans has seen a significant increase in Bystander Administration of Narcan. Table 2 shows New Orleans EMS data between 2019 and 2023 by administration type.

Table 2
Naloxone Administration by Type, 2019-2023

	Total Naloxone Administrations	NO-EMS	NOPD	NOFD	Bystander
2019 Totals	1,133	787	47	277	22
2020 Totals	1,545	1,108	52	321	64
2021 Totals	2,032	1,461	44	524	93
2022 Totals	1,788	1,135	72	459	122
2023 Totals	1,723	1,012	56	420	235
% Change 2022-2023	-3.6%	-10.8%	-22.2%	-8.5%	+92.6%
% Change 2019-2023	+52.1%	+28.6%	+19.1%	+51.6%	+968.2%

ADDRESSING NEEDLE LITTER IN THE COMMUNITY

For the past several years, NOHD has attempted to address the issue of needle litter in public spaces, including parks, under overpasses, and in parking lots. While NOHD has placed syringe disposal boxes in some public spaces, including New Orleans Public Library locations, tackling the issue on a larger scale remained challenging due to a lack of internal capacity to maintain a more robust, city-wide disposal system. As a result, the Health Department released a Request for Proposals in 2023 to identify a vendor to maintain syringe disposal kiosks in areas with large amounts of needle litter, however NOHD received no proposals. In response to follow-up questions as to why they did not submit a proposal, potential vendors cited a lack of resources and capacity for such a complex type of waste disposal. Currently NOHD continues to work with local partners to help existing boxes.



IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY CHANGES

In 2021, in response to the dramatic increase in overdose deaths involving fentanyl, NOHD went before the New Orleans City Council to request that a local ordinance prohibiting the possession of drug testing equipment be amended to exclude fentanyl test strips. Due to the strength and lethality of fentanyl—and its ubiquitous presence in the local drug supply—it was important that individuals who use substances be able to test their drugs for fentanyl to make informed decisions about their consumption without the fear of legal repercussions.

Similarly, the tranquilizer xylazine has increasingly been detected in those who have died of a drug overdose in recent years. Xylazine is commonly added to fentanyl as it mimics its effects, but because it is not an opioid, Narcan does not reverse its side effects. Subsequently, xylazine testing kits were made commercially available in 2023 to allow individuals who use drugs to test substances for the presence of xylazine. Because the New Orleans drug supply is not immune to the infiltration of xylazine or other adulterants, NOHD felt it important to amend local law further to allow the possession of all personal drug testing equipment, regardless of what substance it is testing for. NOHD again went before City Council to propose an amendment to a local ordinance that would make legal the possession of any personal drug testing equipment, and the amendment passed in the spring of 2023. In the fall of 2023, NOHD purchased a total of 13,200 xylazine testing strips to provide partner organizations to distribute to people who inject drugs.

WHAT'S NEXT: 2024

2024 should see some exciting changes to NOHD's opioid abatement activities. With the distribution of Opioid Settlement monies having started in 2023, the Health Department is looking for ways to appropriately spend those funds to ensure that they have maximum impact for individuals affected by the opioid crisis. NOHD has awarded a contract to Tulane University to develop recommendations using a community stakeholder approach. Starting in April 2024, Tulane will facilitate a series of meetings of two separate groups for input: people who are currently using drugs, and representatives from community agencies who frequently engage with individuals who use drugs. Utilizing the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health's [Five Principles for the Use of Funds From the Opioid Litigation](#) as a guide, NOHD's hope is that the resulting strategic plan will provide evidence-based programming ideas from the people who know and understand the world of substance use disorder best. In addition to the strategic planning process, settlement funds will also allow NOHD to continue Narcan distribution efforts and community trainings that were previously funded by a federal grant.

NOHD will also be partnering with the District Attorney's Office to help implement an Opioid Fatality Review panel. The fatality review process collects information about individuals who died from opioid overdose and their interactions with services and systems. The purpose of this panel is to identify system gaps and to develop recommendations to prevent future similar deaths.

Finally, New Orleans EMS is partnering with Odyssey House Louisiana to dispatch quick response teams to the scene of an overdose if someone has refused transport by EMS to the hospital. This team of providers, comprised of people with lived experience, will follow-up with that individual to determine what their needs are and provide connections to care based on the needs that the individual identifies to reduce the risk of future overdose. This may include linkage to substance use treatment, help obtaining basic needs such as food and stable housing, or this could include conversations about using more safely.

CONCLUSION

While we have seen an increase in harm reduction efforts in recent years, tackling the opioid crisis in New Orleans continues to be a complex and evolving challenge. Addressing this crisis requires a holistic approach, working across sectors, to invest in innovative and evidence-based prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support services. And although drug-related deaths in Orleans Parish remain alarmingly high, the New Orleans Health Department hopes that additional funding and expanded partnerships will provide opportunities to help us address this crisis head-on.

