

An Overview of Mississippi's Prescription Painkiller and Heroin Epidemic



State of Mississippi

Department of Public Safety

Bureau of Narcotics

Director John Dowdy

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Contributing Partners



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

BUREAU OF NARCOTICS

Mission

The mission of the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics (MBN) is to reduce the availability of illicit controlled substances within the State of Mississippi. This reduction is accomplished through the use of comprehensive enforcement initiatives, supported by strategic planning and training. To accomplish its mission, the Bureau of Narcotics works closely with local law enforcement agencies within the state, other State of Mississippi agencies, law enforcement agencies from surrounding and other states, and federal drug law enforcement agencies.

Executive Summary

The abuse of and addiction to opioids, morphine, and heroin, is a serious problem in the U.S. that affects the health, social, and economic welfare of all communities. Americans have struggled with the problem of addiction to prescription painkillers, illicit opiates, and various other dangerous drugs for decades. The United States, a nation that consumes more pain medication than all of the other nations combined, is experiencing a horrific event in the form of opioid related addiction and deaths. The problems associated with this struggle have grown. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drugs prescribed for pain, along with heroin and fentanyl, are driving one of our nation's most lethal drug epidemics. The CDC reports for 2017 that there were 70,237 total drug overdose deaths; this is an increase from the 67,265 drug overdose deaths reported in 2016. The age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths in 2017 (21.7 per 100,000) was 9.6% higher than the rate in 2016 (19.8). The age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone (drugs such as fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, and tramadol) increased by 45% between 2016 and 2017, from 6.2 to 9.0 per 100,000.

In terms of abuse and deaths, opioids account for the greatest proportion of the prescription drug abuse problem. One example is that benzodiazepines are commonly prescribed in combination with opioids, even though this combination increases the risk of overdose death. Prescription opioids are one of the three categories of medications that present abuse liability, along with stimulants and central nervous system depressants. Several factors are likely to have contributed to the severity of the current prescription drug abuse epidemic. These factors include: 1) extreme increases in the number of prescriptions written and dispensed, 2) greater social acceptability of using medications for reasons other than prescribed, and 3) aggressive marketing by pharmaceutical companies.

Not unlike marijuana, prescription opioids are often the gateway to other drugs, such as heroin. The increasing use of prescription opioids for pain management has drastically attributed to America's opioid epidemic. Overprescribing of opioids for pain relief produces adverse health outcomes including fatal overdoses. Today's high rates of prescribing indicate the necessity for thorough evaluation of the current practices being used by prescribers and dispensers that should balance pain relief and patient

safety. These factors, together, have significantly increased the availability of prescription medications and opioid analgesics. The magnanimous issues of prescription drug addiction have created the complex public safety threat of criminal organizations being involved in pharmaceutical diversion and pharmacy burglaries facilitating a black market for acquiring these drugs.

Mississippi is continuing to battle the effects of its current opioid epidemic that is driven by opioid drug addiction. For the purposes of this document, opioids will refer to prescription painkillers, heroin and fentanyl. Although methamphetamine (ICE) cases lead the state in the number of cases initiated, pharmaceutical diversion and heroin abuse has the greatest impact on public safety and public health in our state and runs a close second to methamphetamine. The distribution, use, and abuse of methamphetamine (ICE) and opioids are currently plaguing Mississippi and have become its major drug threat. Normally, drug activity and crimes associated with it are traditionally associated with urban areas; however, this opioid epidemic is felt statewide. This emergent epidemic has touched every socioeconomic class, race, and gender. Mississippi is currently under siege and it's going to take the efforts of everyone to free this state from the tragic effects of this opioid crisis.

The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics has noticed a significant increase in the amount of heroin seized during 2018 in comparison to 2017. During 2018 MBN seized 46.37 grams of black tar heroin, 22,300 grams of brown heroin, and 39,868 grams of white heroin. In 2016 MBN seized 0.91 grams of black tar heroin, 170 grams of brown heroin and 311 grams of white heroin and in 2017, MBN seized 1,060.22 grams of black tar heroin, 1,111.96 grams of brown heroin and 88.17 grams of white heroin. Most of the heroin and/or fentanyl seizures in 2018 resulted from interdiction stops and search warrants, although there were a number of buys made from local independent dealers across the state. MBN had 26 buy cases in 2018 resulting in the seizure of approximately 254 grams of heroin, 8 involving fentanyl. This has contributed to our current opioid problem. As the number of people addicted to opioids increase they have sought a much more economical drug to support their addiction. According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), four out of five heroin users became addicted by abusing opioid pills. The increased presence of prescription opioids is concerning due to a potential for user shift to heroin.

MBN's Pharmacy Burglary Unit is continuing to solve the ongoing epidemic of pharmacy burglaries across the state. In 2018, there were a total of 25 (down from 36 in 2017) pharmacy burglaries in Mississippi, 7 of which were attempted burglaries. Pharmacy burglaries decreased in 2017 compared to 2016 with 51 total pharmacy burglaries across the state.

Mississippi has seen fentanyl become more prevalent in 2017 and 2018. According to the Mississippi Forensic Lab Reports, MBN has noticed that several of its lab submissions returned results which included the drug fentanyl mixed with other drugs or simply being sold as another drug such as heroin and oxycodone. If an individual ingests a small amount of fentanyl, thinking they were taking something different, the end result is often lethal.

Narcotics Enforcement Statistics

According to an article written by John S. Kiernan dated May 14, 2018 on Wallethub.com (Drug use by State), Mississippi ranked 36th in the nation as having the largest overall drug problem compared to 22nd in 2017. It ranked 37th for drug use and addiction, and 9th for drug health issues and rehab compared to 30th for drug use and addiction and 33rd for drug health issues and rehab. Wallethub.com reported that law enforcement in Mississippi ranked 30th as it relates to drug issues compared to 9th in 2017. Interestingly enough, this site had Mississippi ranked 3rd for most drug related arrests per capita (see listing below) which is the same as the previous year.

- T-1 South Dakota
- T-1 Wyoming
3. Mississippi
4. Missouri
5. New Jersey

In 2018, there were a total of 16,985 drug related arrests statewide reported to the Mississippi Department of Public Safety (MBN is responsible for a little more than 7% of those arrests).

- MBN arrested 1163 individuals in Mississippi for drug related offenses
- Males accounted for 79% of the MBN drug related arrests in 2018, females 21%
- 50% were Caucasian, 47% African American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% other
- Subjects 17 & under represented 2% of arrests
- Subjects 18-25 represented 19% of arrests
- Subjects 26-35 represented 34% of arrests
- Subjects 36 and up represented 45% of arrests
- 35% arrested for heroin were African American, 47% were Caucasian, and 18% Hispanic
- The number of fentanyl related overdoses have steadily increased over the past two years with a reported number of 61 for 2018 alone

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in 2017 the 5 States with the highest opioid prescribing rates, per 100 persons, were:

1. Alabama: 107.2
2. Arkansas: 105.4
3. Tennessee: 94.4
4. Mississippi: 92.9
5. Louisiana: 89.5

Combatting the Prescription Painkiller and Heroin Epidemic

Through partnerships

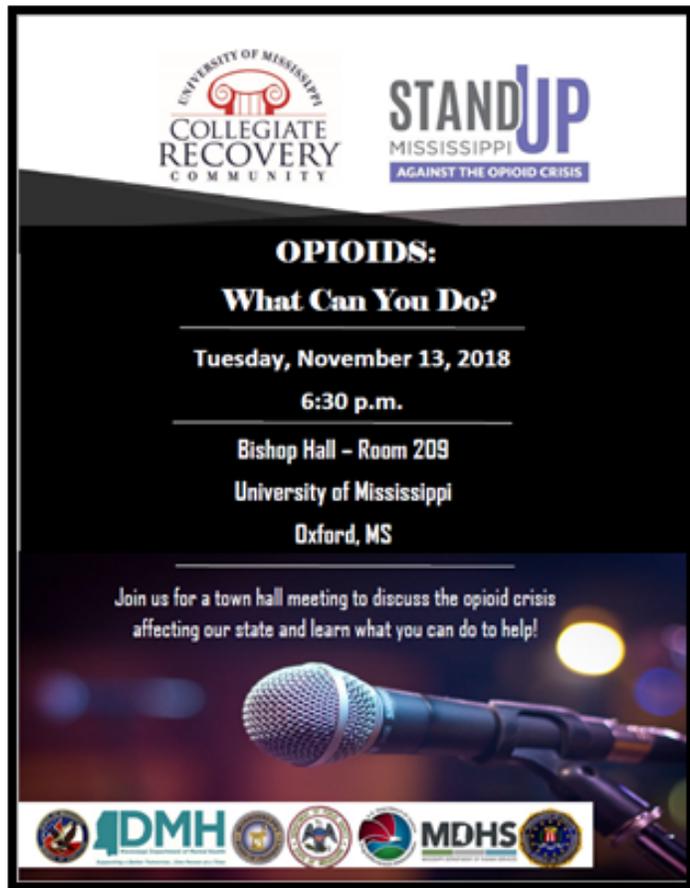
Mississippi is unique in so many ways. It is also a step above and beyond many other states in several aspects. For years, law enforcement across this nation has taken the approach of arrest and incarceration as being the answer to issues that plague our communities. But this approach has been around for decades and still we are experiencing an opioid epidemic nationally. Mississippi is known for its low rating in education, mental health and health care, and its high rating in poverty. Will we ever be first in something other than problems? Currently, we are striving to accomplish this starting with the opioid epidemic. Mississippi has adopted the concept that we can't arrest our way out of this opioid epidemic, however, we will continue to be tough on crime and drug traffickers in our state. Mississippi has realized that doing the same thing over and over and continuing to expect a different result is indeed insanity. Thus, state and federal agencies like the Mississippi Governor's Office, Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics (MBN), Mississippi Department of Public Safety (MDPS), Mississippi Board of Pharmacy (MBP), Mississippi Department of Mental Health (MDMH), Mississippi Forensic Lab (MFL), Mississippi Department of Health (MDH), United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have created a partnership to help combat this crippling, infectious, and deadly epidemic that is afflicting this state. The goal is to accomplish this through law enforcement, regulatory, and treatment and prevention means versus solely a law enforcement approach.

Governor Phil Bryant led the way in this initiative by creating the Mississippi Governor's Opioid and Heroin Study Task Force in December of 2016. The goal of the task force was to develop a strategic plan to combat the opioid and heroin epidemic in Mississippi. This task force was chaired by MBN Director John Dowdy, and consisted of members from the medical, law enforcement, mental health, and recovery communities. This group provided Governor Bryant with recommendations for future legislation and regulatory measures to help reduce the number of addicted Mississippians and the number of opioid related fatalities. It also provided suggestions to improve reporting issues such as overdose deaths, providing the state a much better system of accountability and the ability to determine the magnitude of the opioid crisis in a much timelier manner.

On May 23, 2017, this collaboration began a statewide campaign, hosting town hall meetings to educate Mississippians about the dangerous effects this epidemic is having on the state of Mississippi. A total of 32 meetings were held in 2017 and 2018 with a total of approximately 3,347 people in attendance. The goal was to educate more people about opioid abuse and what they can do to help reduce the death and destruction caused by opioid addiction. The partnership believed that getting out and going to various areas in the state would help get the word out concerning the significance of this crisis we're currently experiencing. During each of these meetings statistical data on the national level, as well as state level, was relayed to the public. Mississippians were also presented information as it related specifically to their county of residence. Information concerning the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MSPMP) and treatment and prevention were provided to the public. In each of these meetings the public was allowed to ask questions, this ensured that everyone left the meeting more empowered than before they arrived.

2017 and 2018 Town Hall Meetings

City	Date	# of attendees
Brandon	5/23/2017	119
Diamondhead	6/13/2017	75
Hattiesburg	6/27/2017	150
Tupelo	7/18/2017	175
Southaven	8/1/2017	125
Columbus	8/15/2017	150
Laurel	8/29/2017	146
Jackson	9/12/2017	109
Indianola	9/19/2017	104
Vicksburg	9/26/2017	120
Oxford	10/3/2017	110
Gautier	10/17/2017	90
Meridian	10/24/2017	230
Grenada	11/7/2017	250
Brookhaven	11/14/2017	97
Picayune	11/21/2017	76
Jackson	11/28/2017	70
Philadelphia	12/5/2017	72
Kosciusko	4/10/2018	70
Corinth	4/24/2018	81
Cleveland	5/8/2018	25
Lucedale	5/22/2018	88
Hazlehurst	6/5/2018	69
Natchez	6/19/2018	101
Clarksdale	7/10/2018	55
Biloxi	7/24/2018	70
Wiggins	8/7/2018	75
Carthage	8/21/2018	100
USM	9/28/2018	89
MSU	10/9/2018	100
JSU	10/23/2018	56
Ole Miss	11/13/2018	100
Total:	32 events	3,347 people



In July of 2018, Mississippi hosted its second two-day opioid and heroin summit. From July 12-13, 2018, Battling the Opioid Crisis Summit was held at Broadmoor Baptist Church in Madison, MS. This summit again served as a platform to educate more Mississippians about the epidemic of opioid and heroin abuse that is crippling the state of Mississippi. Once again, we wanted to let people know that this epidemic wasn't just a public safety or public health problem, but one that affects all of Mississippi. This forum provided the public with an opportunity to learn about the many treatment options that are available to them. People were also able to hear addiction stories from people of all socioeconomic backgrounds, as they expressed how drug addiction affected their lives.

Another positive effect of the partnership between the above-mentioned organizations was the acquisition and distribution of naloxone, a medication

used to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, to law enforcement agencies and first responders throughout the state. With the use of a grant obtained by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, 14,019 two-dose units of Narcan® Nasal Spray have been dispensed amongst 252 different Mississippi agencies. As a result of the Narcan® dispersal beginning in August 2017, law enforcement and first

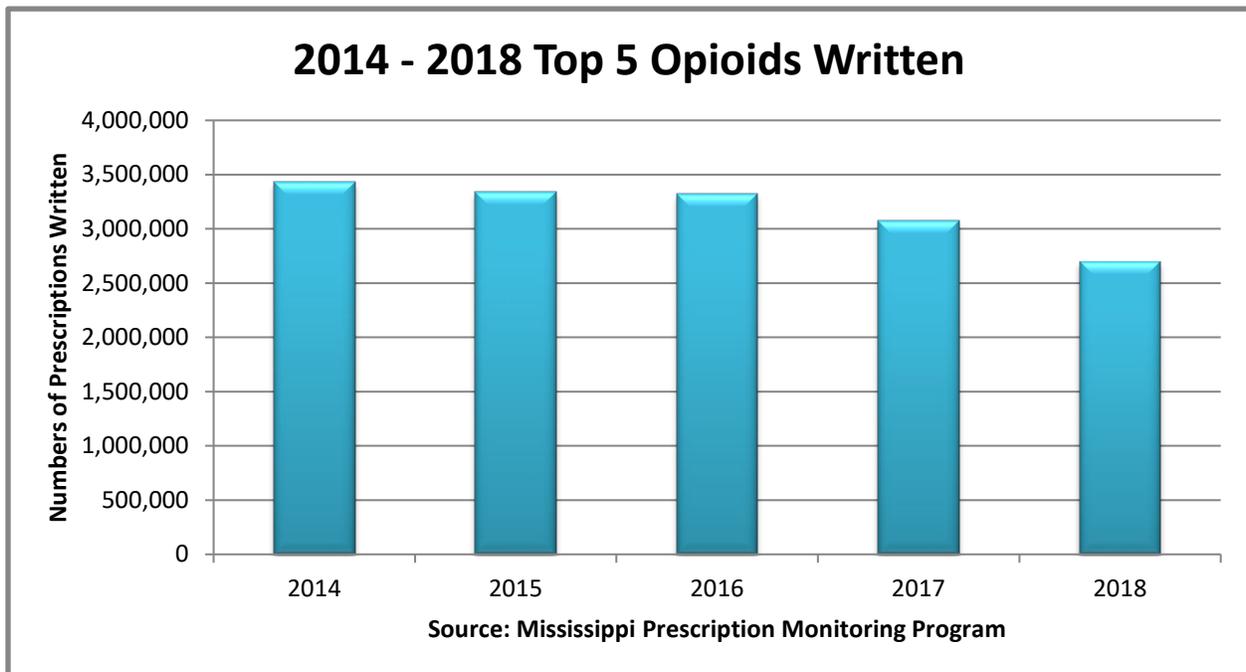
responders have been able to successfully save 82 lives as of February 22, 2019, with the expectation that the number of saved lives will continue to grow.

Through the use of grant funding, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health was also able to purchase 27 prescription drug drop boxes. Including the 9 existing MBN drop boxes already stationed in Mississippi Highway Patrol (MHP) Troop Headquarters, Mississippians now have access to prescription drop boxes at 36 different law enforcement agencies (listed below) throughout the state, with plans for additional purchases and placements in the future.

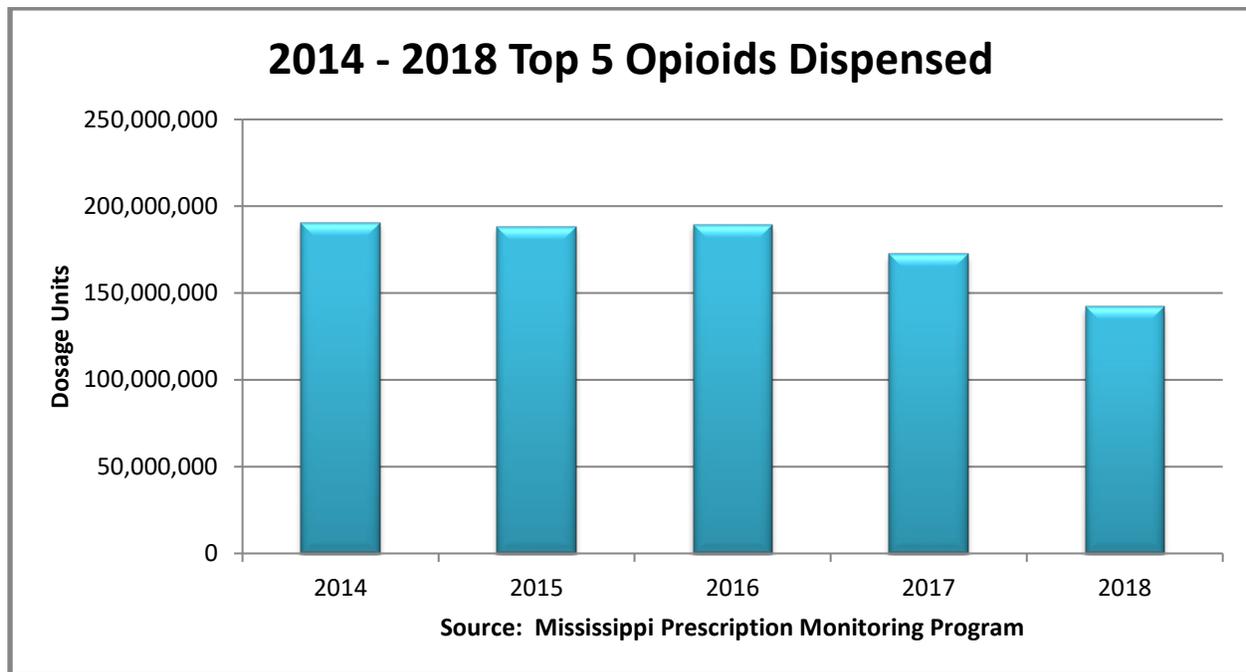
- Bay St. Louis Police Department
- Biloxi Police Department
- Brandon Police Department
- Byram Police Department
- Columbus Police Department
- D'Iberville Police Department
- Gulfport Police Department
- Jackson Police Department – JPD Headquarters
- Jackson Police Department – Precinct 1
- Jackson Police Department – Precinct 2
- Jackson Police Department – Precinct 3
- Jackson Police Department – Precinct 4
- Kemper County School District
- Long Beach Police Department
- Louisville Police Department
- McComb Police Department
- MHP – Batesville
- MHP – Biloxi
- MHP – Brookhaven
- MHP – Hattiesburg
- MHP – Jackson I-55
- MHP – Meridian
- MHP – Pearl
- MHP – Starkville
- MHP – Tupelo
- Moss Point Police Department
- MSU Campus Police Department
- Ocean Springs Police Department
- Oxford Police Department
- Pascagoula Police Department
- Pass Christian Police Department
- Pearl Police Department
- Ridgeland Police Department
- Smith County Sheriff's Department
- Vicksburg Police Department
- Waveland Police Department

An Overview of Mississippi's Opioid Epidemic

Illustrated below is a comparison of the top 5 prescribed opioids for the State of Mississippi from 2014 through 2018, which provides a yearly comparison of the number of top 5 opioid dosage units dispensed each year in this state. (**NOTE:** In early 2015, MSPMP underwent a vender reporting change. Various NDC code and DEA number issues affected the final numbers. Therefore, some numbers that were previously reported for 2014, may have minor differences due to resubmissions). According to information provided by the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program, for the past 5 years, the top 5 prescribed opioids have been the same. The ranking of the top 5 opioids written is as follows: 1. Hydrocodone 2. Oxycodone 3. Tramadol 4. Buprenorphine 5. Codeine. The top 5 opioids dispensed for 2014 – 2017 are as follows: 1. Hydrocodone 2. Oxycodone 3. Tramadol 4. Codeine 5. Morphine. However, for 2018 the rankings are: 1. Hydrocodone 2. Oxycodone 3. Tramadol 4. Buprenorphine 5. Codeine.



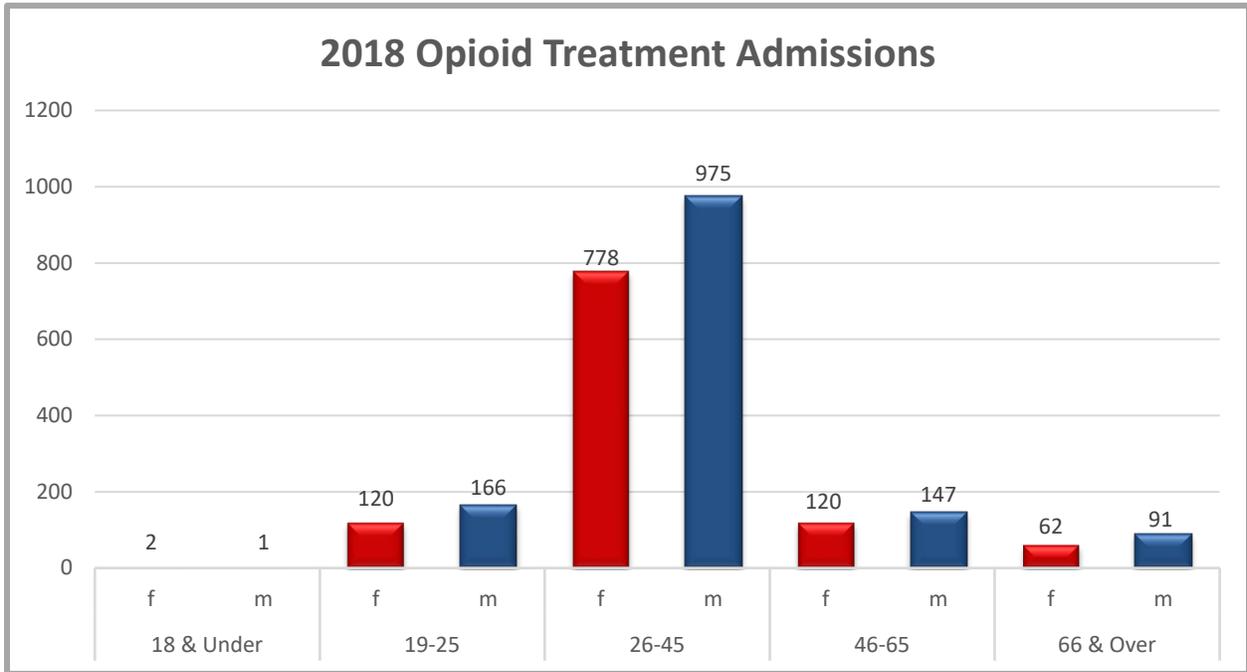
Throughout the past 5 years, Mississippi had a 22% decrease in the number of opioid prescriptions written. As one may have guessed, hydrocodone has reigned as the most prescribed and most dispensed opioid in the state of Mississippi during that time period. In 2014, there were more than 3.4 million prescriptions written for opioids in a state where the population is approximately 2.9 million. That's approximately 1.17 prescriptions for every person living in the state. Remember, this is just for the top 5 opioids and not all of them. In 2015, there was a slight decrease to approximately 1.15 prescriptions per person. The prescribing of opioids continued to drop over the next couple of years, however, the most considerable reduction was seen in 2018. There were approximately 0.93 opioid prescriptions written per person in Mississippi. According to the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program, there were 2,851,894 total opioid prescriptions written which was approximately 44.45% of all controlled substances submitted to the MSPMP for 2018. The total quantity of opioids dispensed for 2018 was 145,743,886 dosage units.



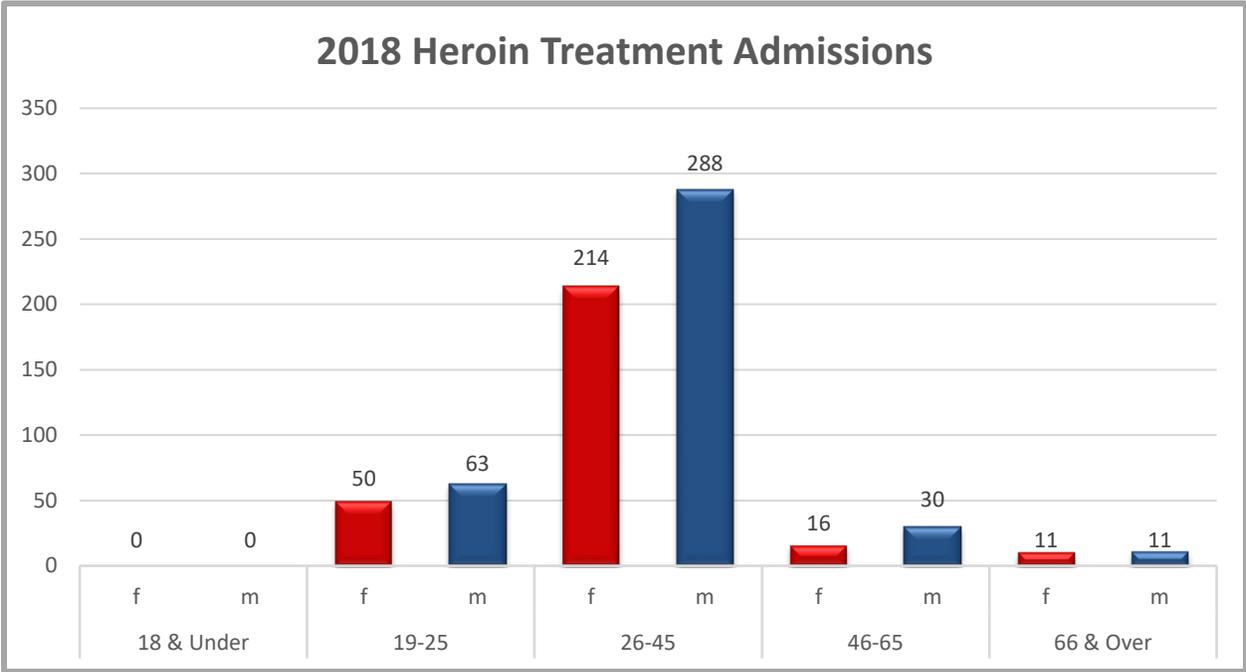
From 2014 to 2018, Mississippi has experienced an approximate 25% reduction in the number of dosage units dispensed for the top 5 opioids. The top 5 opioids dispensed for 2014 – 2017 are as follows: 1. Hydrocodone 2. Oxycodone 3. Tramadol 4. Codeine 5. Morphine. However, for 2018 the rankings are: 1. Hydrocodone 2. Oxycodone 3. Tramadol 4. Buprenorphine 5. Codeine. According to the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program, there were 190,501,110 dosage units of the top 5 opioids dispensed in 2014. From 2015 to 2016, there was a slight increase in the top 5 opioids dispensed in Mississippi. Of the top 5 opioids, there were 189,369,214 dosage units dispensed in 2016 yet, there was a decrease in 2017 where only 172,487,270 were dispensed.

This past year, Mississippi has seen a slight drop in the number of prescriptions written as well as the number of opioids dispensed. In 2018, we saw an approximate 18% decrease in the number of dosage units dispensed for the top 5 opioids in the state. This drop is a significant step towards combatting the opioid epidemic that we are currently facing. In 2017, there were 3,302,879 opioid prescriptions written and opioids accounted for 46% of all controlled substances written according to the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program. For the approximated population of Mississippi (2.9 million), that yields nearly 63 dosage units per person (including men, women, and children). In 2018, there were 2,851,894 opioid prescriptions written with opioids accounting for 44.45% of all controlled substances written. This yields about 145,743,886 dosage units of opioids for 2018. That’s an average of 399,298 dosage units dispensed each day in Mississippi, which equates to approximately 50 dosage units per person.

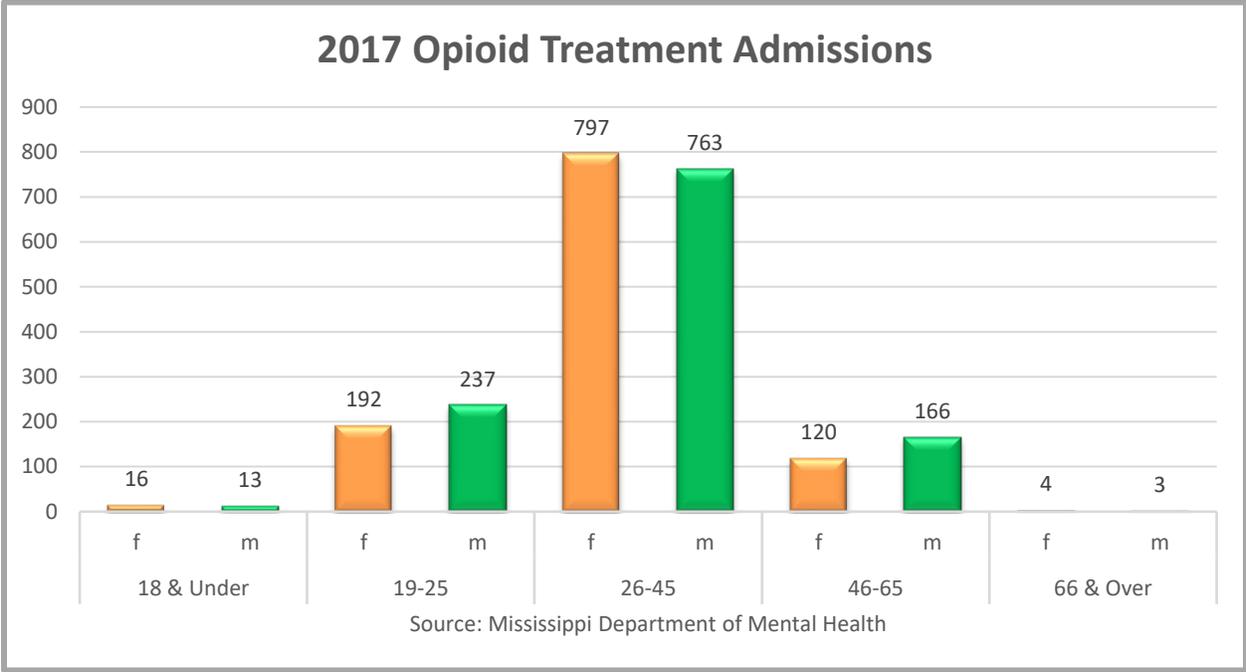
2017 and 2018 Heroin AND Opioid Treatment Admissions



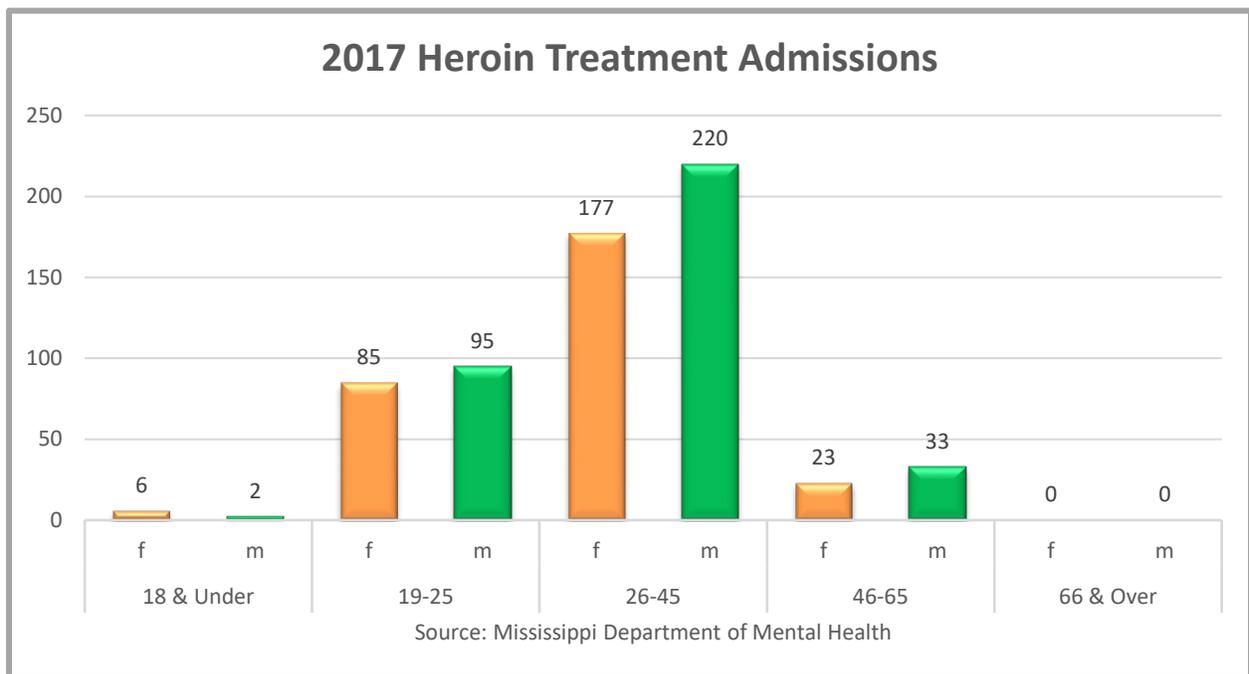
In 2018, there were approximately 12,584 people treated in Mississippi at facilities that are associated with and or funded by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health. 6,356 of them were treated for primary substance abuse, 4,044 were treated for secondary substance abuse, and there were 2,184 people treated for tertiary substance abuse. A total of 2,462 people were treated for opioid abuse in 2018. All individuals that were treated were only counted once. However, this total number does not include individuals who were treated at private facilities or clinics that are not associated with the Mississippi Department of Mental Health. The age group most affected by this opioid epidemic was the 26 to 45, which accounts for approximately 1,753 or 71% of the individuals treated for 2018. Of the 1,753 people treated in that age group, approximately 56% were males. The most heartbreaking was the 18 and under age group, where approximately 217 children were treated for substance abuse. There were approximately 2 times more young males treated than females. The opioid related numbers were obtained from only three substance categories: Heroin, Non-prescription methadone, and other opiates and synthetics. This epidemic is having a profound effect on our young to middle age citizens. Taking a closer look at it, this is a large portion of our working class/age people. They also play a role in our state's economy and expenditures for things such as treatment.



In 2018, there were 683 admissions for heroin use/abuse in Mississippi, according to statistics received from Mississippi Department of Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Services. Of those admitted, 153 were also being treated for the use and abuse of a second or third drug. The age group most affected was the 26 to 45, which accounted for approximately 73% of the total number treated for heroin. Likewise, the age group of patients 19 to 25 had a total of 113 admissions. The gender diversity of total patients admitted for heroin abuse during 2018, were 291 females and 392 males. The number of heroin admissions has continued to increase more and more each year. 2018 has shown us the horrifying truth that heroin is attacking our youth.



There were slightly more treatment admissions for substance use/abuse for Mississippi in 2017 as compared to 2018, according to statistics from the Mississippi Department of Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Services. There were 13,224 individuals treated for substance abuse in 2017, compared to the 12,584 treated in 2018. Please keep in mind that these numbers are only reported by facilities that are affiliated with the Mississippi Department of Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Services. This is simply an illustration of how wicked this epidemic is and the effects it's having on the citizens of Mississippi. The numbers appearing in this report are only a portion of those who sought treatment. For just a moment, ponder on what the actual numbers should look like. According to statistics from the Mississippi Department of Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Services, 2,311 patients were treated for opioid use/abuse for 2017. This is approximately 9% more than the number of opioid treatment admissions from 2018. This is an indication that the outreach efforts of the collaboration between MBN, MBP, MDMH, MDH, MFL, and our federal partners are working.



In 2017, there were 641 patients admitted for heroin use/abuse in Mississippi, according to statistics received from the Mississippi Department of Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Services. 29% of those treated for heroin were also being treated for the use/abuse of other drugs. The number of heroin admissions have more than doubled since 2016. More and more Mississippians are abusing opioids and causing an enormous amount of problems for this state. This displays a 9% increase of heroin treatment admissions from 2017 to 2018. This increase in treatment numbers continues to show the effect that this epidemic is having on the state of Mississippi. Once again, the 26-45 age group (our workers, parents, children, etc.) is impacted by this manmade plague. This particular age group makes up approximately 62% of the patients treated for heroin abuse. Just think, people in this age group are the ones rearing or parenting the majority of the children in our state. If the parents are doing it, what do you think the children will do?

The following information is a review of Overdose Deaths as a result of Mississippi's Opioid Epidemic from the perspective of the Mississippi Forensics Lab, provided by Director Sam Howell (all data is current as of April 12, 2019)

More overdoses were reported in 2018 than 2017 primarily due to the increased reporting of cases by coroners. Methamphetamine continues to be the most common drug associated with overdose deaths in the State. Almost 40% of the overdose deaths contained methamphetamine by itself or in combination with other drugs. Although methamphetamine has been around for a while, the current epidemic differs from times past due to its strength or purity. During the clandestine methamphetamine lab crisis, prior to controlling pseudoephedrine, the methamphetamine produced was often not pure. In fact, synthesis from pseudoephedrine was often not a completed process and the methamphetamine was usually cut. Today's methamphetamine is almost always found in crystal form and relatively pure. Users are often unfamiliar with the use of a pure compound resulting in a rapid death after injection.

To further complicate the overdose issue, cocaine, methamphetamine, and/or heroin are often found in combination with fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. Fentanyl is significantly more potent than morphine and the analogues can be 10-100x more potent than fentanyl itself. In 2018, the State Crime Laboratory reported carfentanil, valeryl fentanyl, methoxy fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl, and methoxyacetyl fentanyl in overdose cases. 16% of all the cases contained fentanyl or an analogue of fentanyl.

Cocaine was detected in 14% of the cases; heroin was detected in 16% of the total, and 64% percent of the cases contained cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, heroin, or a combination of these.

"Huffing" Freon (1,1 Difluoroethane) from air duster cans always results in a few deaths every year. Synthetic cannabinoids are also still responsible for a few deaths each year. In 2018, 5F-ADB and FUB-AMB were causative factors in at least three deaths.

Of note, is the increasing popularity of Mitragynine (Kratom). Currently still not controlled on a State level, many local jurisdictions have taken the initiative to regulate sale and possession themselves. There are a number of serious toxicological concerns with this substance. It has been reported to have a stimulant effect at lower doses, to include agitation and anxiety, and an analgesic effect at higher doses mimicking opiates. A number of the overdoses in the State this past year included the presence of mitragynine, which could significantly enhance overall central nervous system depression in the presence of other opiates or CNS depressant drugs. There are reports of cardiac arrest due to cardiac toxicity of one or more compounds present in the material believed to affect the heart's calcium channels. Of further concern is that this compound is known to have pharmacological activity and is not regulated in preparation, distribution, concentration or quality control. In fact, recent studies have shown preparations to be contaminated with other significant toxicants such as toxic heavy metals and salmonella poisoning outbreaks.

It is still difficult to know the full scope of the involvement of some of these compounds in sudden unexpected deaths in the State. Most hospital laboratories do not test for synthetic cannabinoids, fentanyl analogues, or other novel psychoactive substances. Currently, treatment is usually based on symptomology or sometimes-hopeful recognition of a potential toxidrome associated with a specific type of compound.

Over the past 3 decades, you could usually relate most overdoses to a set number of compounds, to include a few drugs of abuse and some prescription medications. Unfortunately, that cannot be said today. The current challenges facing forensic laboratories, coroners, law enforcement, and physicians with a seemingly infinite number of readily available toxic possibilities, especially over the internet, and a constantly changing market are daunting.

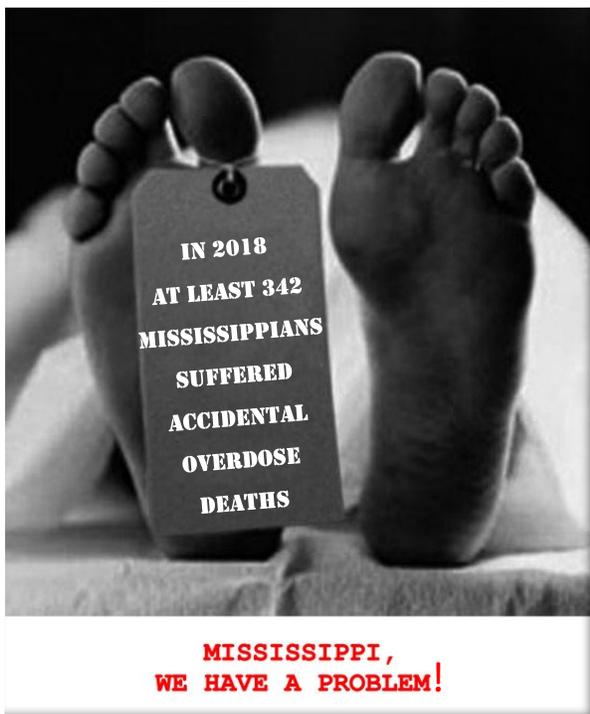
Opioid Drug Overdose Deaths (as reported to MBN)

The following information is a review of the Overdose Deaths (2015-2018) as reported to MBN by Coroners from across the state (all data is provisional and current as of March 25, 2019):

Our nation is in the midst of an unprecedented opioid epidemic. Mississippi is also experiencing an extraordinary opioid crisis. More than three times as many people died in Mississippi from opioid related overdose deaths than other illicit drugs. In 2017, coroners reported 31 heroin related accidental overdose deaths to the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics. In 2018, there were 342 accidental drug related overdose deaths reported to MBN, compared to 256 in 2017. 210 of those deaths reported were opioid related, 55 were heroin related, 17 were from a combination of heroin and fentanyl, and 61 were fentanyl related. This leaves 111 that were prescription opioid drug related. 61% of the total number of overdose deaths reported to MBN were opioid related.

The MS Poison Control Center takes all calls from individuals who “willingly” call to report a possible overdose of narcotics, chemicals and other dangerous drugs. According to the MS Poison Control in 2018, the MS Poison Control fielded over 304 opioid related calls and 268 amphetamine related calls. Of the 304 calls, 42 were for heroin and 8 were for fentanyl. It should be noted that these numbers reflect only those individuals who were able to receive some type of assistance during an emergency.

The proverbial monster known as opioid addiction/abuse haunts Mississippi and its severity is intensifying yearly. Throughout the past 4 years, 836 drug overdose deaths were reported to MBN. Of those reported, 570 were opioid related. Therefore, more than 68% of the reported overdoses were a result of the illusive and cunning beast known as opioid addiction. There were 342 overdose deaths reported to MBN in 2018. Of those deaths, 210 were determined to be opioid related. The following informational maps provide a visual depiction of how the opioid epidemic has affected our state. These maps will identify the areas that are significantly impacted by opioid addiction/abuse in Mississippi. These numbers are only those that were reported to MBN as deaths resulting from drugs. Taking a



realistic look at the numbers, they do not include those who survived an overdose after being treated and released from hospitals. Better yet, it does not include those who overdosed at home and were able to recover without having to seek professional medical treatment, nor do they include deaths where toxic levels of drugs were in a person’s system but the death was determined to be attributed to some other cause. The numbers captured in these maps are accidental overdose deaths which do not include suicides.

NOTE: MBN collaborated with several coroners in an attempt to obtain some of the missing overdose death data. The following mapped data provided is an update of statistics from MBN and does not include statistics from local, other state, or federal agencies. These maps are current as of March 22, 2018. Some overdose deaths are reported late because coroners haven’t been able to confirm the suspected death pending the results of toxicology reports and autopsies.

Summary

Drug overdose deaths and opioid-involved deaths continue to increase in Mississippi. The majority of drug overdose deaths (61%) involve an opioid. The number of overdose deaths involving opioids (including prescription opioids and heroin) has noticeably risen from 184 reported in 2017. According to the Mississippi Department of Vital Statistics, 283 Mississippians died in Mississippi from drug overdose deaths in 2017. That's 27 more deaths than what was reported to MBN for the same year. Reporting of overdose deaths by coroners and other medical professionals is continuing to improve. From 2016 to 2018, more than 707 Mississippians died from drug overdoses. On average, one Mississippian died every day from an opioid drug overdose death, according to information reported to MBN by coroners for 2018. The current opioid epidemic is the deadliest drug crisis in this state's history. Overdoses, fueled mostly by opioids, killed roughly 342 people in Mississippi last year according to information reported to MBN. We can certainly be assured that the number is greater. The drug culture in Mississippi continues to evolve. We are seeing more and more fentanyl accompanying other drugs in toxicology reports for overdose deaths. More drug dealers are mixing fentanyl with other drugs. They are also selling fentanyl as heroin in many areas of the state. The drug trends that accompany this progression have proven to be an increasingly dangerous and potent threat to the public safety and public health of the residents of this state.

Many good things continue to result from collaborations. One good thing that resulted from the educational collaboration between MBN and MBP is that the number of successful pharmacy burglaries are down from 38 in 2017, to 25 in 2018. That's almost a 35% drop in the number of successful burglaries. MBN, working in conjunction with the Mississippi Board of Pharmacy, collaborated and developed an educational piece for the Independent Pharmacists to help them prevent their establishments from becoming victims of burglaries. Yes, the number of burglaries are down, but still drugs hit the streets of Mississippi communities as a result of these criminal acts. This is not taking into account the amounts of drugs that are missing from pharmaceutical distribution companies such as: Cardinal Health and Gulf Coast Pharmaceuticals, and McKesson Corp (all in Mississippi). We can also attribute the reduction in the number of opioids dispensed in Mississippi to educational awareness provided to citizens and medical professionals by the contributing partners. In 2018 21 of 82 counties had over 1 opioid prescription per person written, down from 67 in 2016. This is a 69% decrease in opioid prescriptions written per person by county. Mississippi is a resilient state. Mississippians are a people who will come together to overcome any situation. Look at what happened with Katrina, the spice epidemic in 2015, and now we are well on our way in an effort to defeat this current plague that is upon us.

MBN has committed to working with public health agencies, medical professionals, coroners, and other law enforcement agencies to improve detection of outbreaks of drug overdose deaths involving licit and illicit opioids (including heroin and illicit fentanyl). Through this collaboration we have formed partnerships, data sharing groups, and increased relationships with coroners resulting in MBN Agents responding to the scenes of many overdose deaths. Through these relationships agents have been able to identify some of the dealers who are distributing these dangerous drugs in our fair state and develop prosecutable cases against them. These rapid and effective responses will help address this emerging threat to public health and safety. As a whole we need to take a look at the economic impact that this epidemic is having on our state. This epidemic is affecting Mississippi's economy in the areas of high cost of incarceration, treatment and prevention for addiction (long term and short term), unemployment rate (more people addicted the less people are working and the fewer people are

available that can pass drug screenings), and a lack of an educated work force. These are just a few things that are effected by the current drug epidemic that is vexing Mississippi.

As demonstrated through the statistics provided by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, we are indeed experiencing an opioid epidemic. We've seen our treatment numbers continuously increase throughout the years. Approximately 217 of the 12,584 individuals treated in 2018, were 18 years and under. If we fail to take immediate action it will swiftly overtake and ruin the way of life for numerous Mississippians, especially our children. We will continue to endure drug related crimes, diversion of pharmaceutical drugs, astronomical accidental overdose deaths, and countless tax dollars utilized for treatment/prevention programs. After all, in 2018 alone, nearly 17,000 people were arrested in Mississippi for drug related offences. According to Mississippi Department of Vital Statistics, 283 Mississippians died in 2017 of accidental overdose deaths in the state of Mississippi. An additional 34 Mississippians died of an accidental drug overdose death in other states. Therefore, giving us a total of 317 Mississippians who died as a result of drug overdoses in 2017. The alarming truth is that this problem is truly greater than the data we are able to capture and distribute in a timely manner. It is apparent that Mississippi is well on its way to becoming much like other states as it relates to this opioid epidemic and possibly known as "***the most addicted state in the country.***" Mississippi has its share of problems, so let's try to eliminate addiction and accidental overdose deaths as one of them! Therefore, I ask: what are you going to do in order to get Mississippi back on track to becoming a prosperous state free from this heinous and deadly crisis?

SOURCES

The following served as sources in the preparation of this document:

- ◆ Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- ◆ Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)
- ◆ Gulf Coast High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (GCHIDTA)
- ◆ Mississippi Board of Pharmacy (MBP)
- ◆ Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Intelligence Division (MBN)
- ◆ Mississippi Department of Health Vital Statistics (MDH)
- ◆ Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Services (MDMH)
- ◆ Mississippi Department of Public Safety (MDPS)
- ◆ Mississippi Forensics Laboratory (MFL)
- ◆ Mississippi Poison Control Center (MPCC)
- ◆ Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MSPMP)
- ◆ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- ◆ United States Census Bureau
- ◆ Wallethub.com



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Mississippi Office of the Governor
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Supporting a Better Tomorrow...One Person at a Time

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