

# Public Health Importance Summary

All of the DPH documents can be obtained at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/stop-addiction/current-statistics.html>

- The percentage of illicit drug users in the general population was higher in 2014 than any other year since 2002 (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2015)
- In MA 2014 saw a 65% increase in unintentional opioid-related overdose deaths relative to 2012 (DPH, 2016)
- Estimates from DPH (2016) for the time period between January and September 2015 indicated that White non-Hispanic (83%), males (76%), aged 25-44 years (56%) accounted for the majority of opioid-related fatal overdoses
- DPH (2016) estimates for the number of opioid-related overdose deaths in 2014 included: 37 overdose deaths in Lynn; 27 overdose deaths in New Bedford; 3 overdose deaths in Chelsea; and, 2 overdose deaths in Orange.
- Non-fatal overdoses in Massachusetts further accounted for approximately 2,000 hospital stays and 4,500 emergency department visits in 2013 (DPH, *Burden of Unintentional Opioid-related Overdoses Massachusetts, 2013*).

## **2. Public Health Importance**

In the U.S. the percentage of illicit drug users in the general population was higher in 2014 than any other year since 2002 (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2015). This figure is concerning given the adverse health effects associated with drug use, including mortality (Chen & Lin, 2009). Overdose and death due to illicit drug use has emerged as a primary concern in Massachusetts, particularly with respect to opioids.

According to a data brief reported in January 2016 by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), 2014 saw a 65% increase in unintentional opioid-related overdose deaths relative to 2012. Figures for the time period between January and September 2015 indicated that White non-Hispanic (83%), males (76%), aged 25-44 years (56%) accounted for the majority of opioid-related fatal overdoses (DPH, 2016). DPH (2016) estimates for the number of opioid-related overdose deaths in 2014 included: 37 overdose deaths in Lynn; 27 overdose deaths in New Bedford; 3 overdose deaths in Chelsea; and, 2 overdose deaths in Orange. Non-fatal overdoses in Massachusetts further accounted for approximately 2,000 hospital stays and 4,500 emergency department visits in 2013 (DPH, *Burden of Unintentional Opioid-related Overdoses Massachusetts, 2013*).

In Massachusetts, the seriousness of the public health consequences associated with substance use, and in particular opioid use, led to the formation of Governor Baker's Opioid Addiction Working Group. The Opioid Addiction Working Group has made several important recommendations. These recommendations included an acknowledgement that traditional criminal justice processes are not an appropriate response to offenders with substance use disorders. The current application aims to evaluate several Massachusetts drug courts (Lynn, New Bedford, Chelsea, and Orange), which combine intensive treatment with supervision in effort to address the needs of substance disordered offenders. Research of this nature has the potential to inform policy and practice aimed at addressing the harm related to substance use.

## References

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