

# Opioid overdose deaths: Rise due to *non-prescription* sources



- VA researchers cross-checked National Death Index data with VHA records between 2010–2016 to trace causes of **opioid overdose deaths**.
- Prescription opioid receipt within 3 months before death **declined** from **54%** in 2010 to **26%** in 2016.
- **Synthetic opioid** (including fentanyl, usually from illicit sources) and **heroin overdose rates increased substantially** during this time.

**Conclusions:** “Opioid overdose rates among [VHA] Veterans increased because of increases in heroin and synthetic opioid overdose rates. ... By 2016, only a minority received an opioid analgesic from VHA within 3 months of overdose. Future prevention efforts should extend beyond patients actively receiving opioid prescriptions.”