The United States' Quiet Crisis of Growing Alcohol Deaths

As the national opioid epidemic has garnered enormous attention, alcohol-involved deaths have steadily grown in the United States, but without the same widespread public awareness and countless headlines.

Because alcohol contributes to so many diseases, it is challenging to calculate a complete death toll for alcohol. However, even an conservative estimate that counts only causes of death that are 100 percent attributable to alcohol yields a rate of 10.4 deaths per 100,000 people in 2019—49 percent higher than the U.S. rate in 2006.[1,2,3] By comparison, the U.S. death rate caused by overdoses of all types of opioids—including heroin, prescription painkillers, illicitly trafficked fentanyl, and other less-common forms of opioids—was 15.5 deaths per 100,000 people.

Although opioid overdose death rates are significantly higher than alcohol death rates at the U.S. level, death rates from both causes vary widely across the states. In fact, alcohol-involved death rates in 2019 were as high as or significantly higher than opioid overdose deaths in 21 states. To put the growing public health crisis of alcohol deaths in context, this set of infographics provides data comparing alcohol-involved deaths and opioid overdose deaths for 50 states and the District of Columbia. SHADAC has also produced an accompanying issue brief that examines trends and variations in alcohol-related death rates across the nation, among the states, and by subpopulation breakdowns from 2006 to 2019.

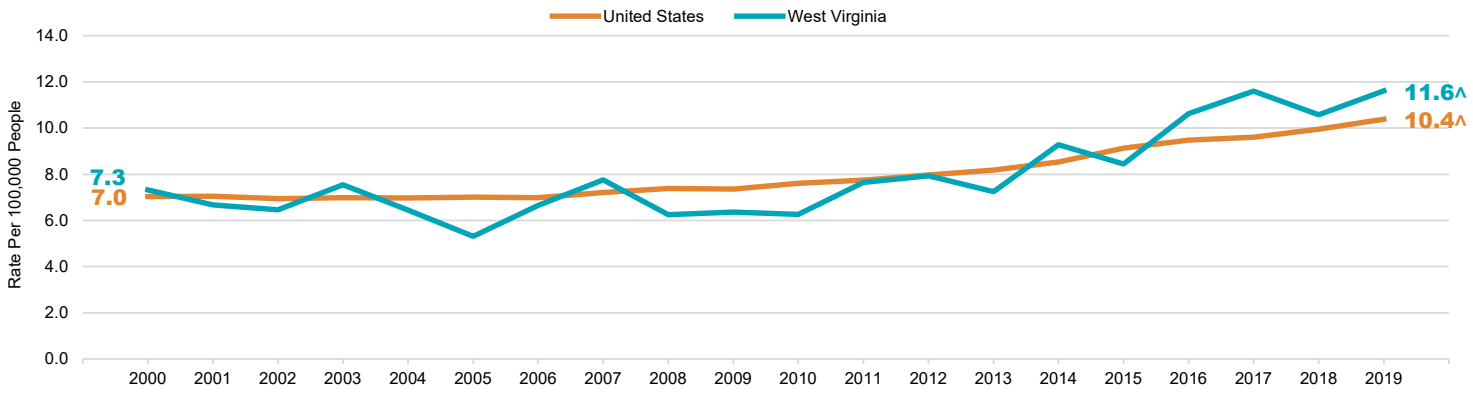
West Virginia

In 2019,

252

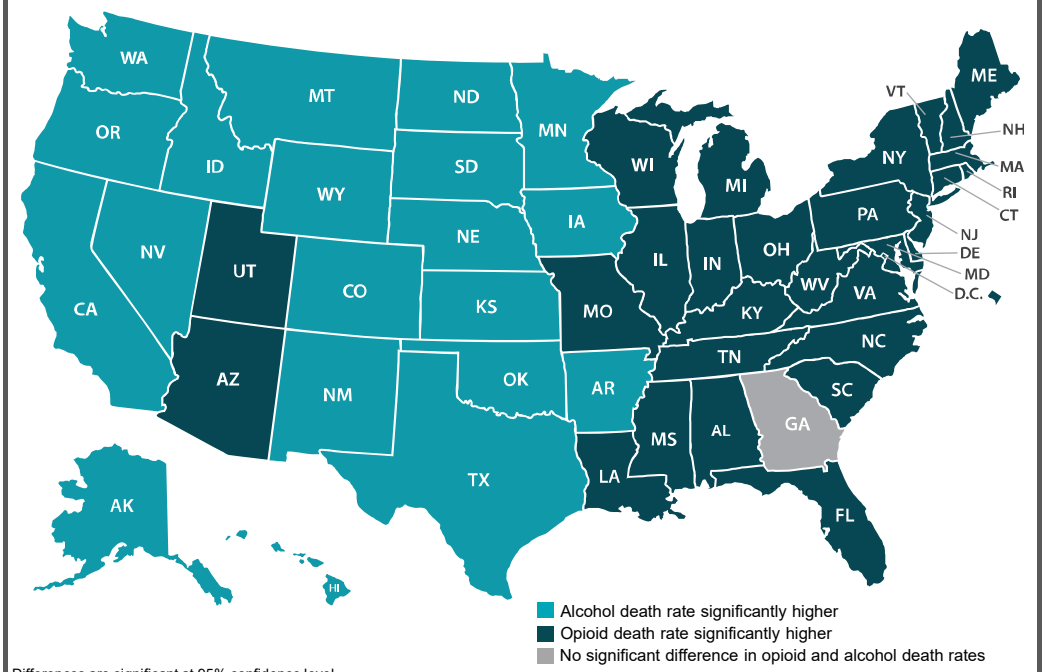
alcohol-involved deaths occurred in West Virginia

Trends in Alcohol Death Rates per 100,000 people, 2000-2019



^ Difference from the 2000 rate is significant at 95% confidence level.

State Alcohol Death Rates vs. Opioid Death Rates, 2019



Differences are significant at 95% confidence level.

West Virginia Death Rates Per 100,000 people

West Virginia's opioid overdose death rate was

256% HIGHER

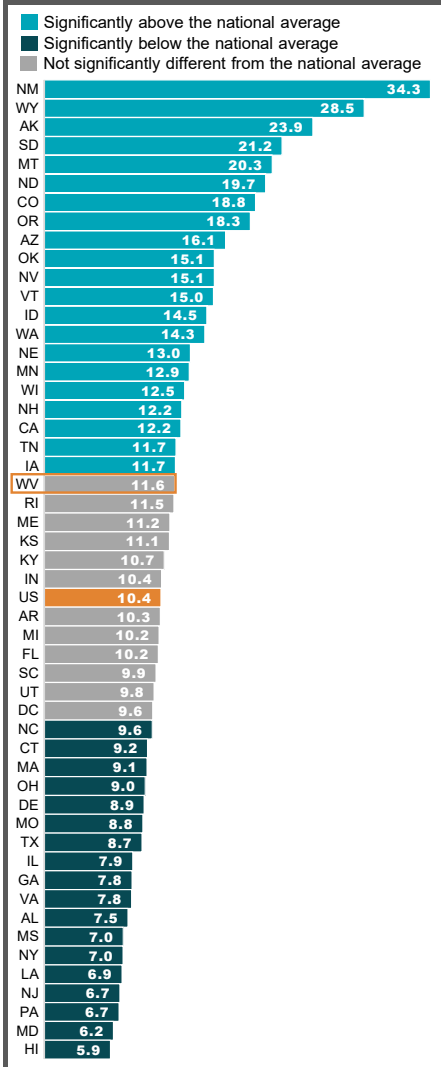
than its alcohol-involved death rate.

Opioid Death Rate: 41.4

Alcohol Death Rate: 11.6

Differences are significant at 95% confidence level.

State Variation in Alcohol Death Rates per 100,000 People, 2019



Difference from national rate is significant at 95% confidence level.

1 Planalp, C., Au-Yeung, C., & Winkelman, T. (2021). *Escalating Alcohol-Involved Death Rates: Trends and Variation across the Nation and in the States from 2006 to 2019.* State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC). https://www.shadac.org/publications/state-national-alcohol-involved-death-rates-2006-2019

2 Using our narrow definition of only mortality that is 100 percent attributable to alcohol, the U.S. recorded almost 37,500 alcohol-involved deaths in 2018. By comparison, a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that used a broader definition of mortality due to "excessive alcohol use" estimated more than 95,000 deaths annually—roughly 2.5 times our highly conservative estimate of alcohol-involved deaths.

3 https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6939a6.htm

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STATE HEALTH ACCESS DATA ASSISTANCE CENTER

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