



# 2019 COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROJECT

## Substance Use and Misuse: Summary of Key Findings



Anchorage  
Health  
Department

# ANCHORAGE IS A VIBRANT CITY.

A place that people call home. We live here for the beautiful scenery, accessible outdoors, community connection and frontier spirit that defines Alaska. The Anchorage Health Department (AHD)'s vision is for Anchorage to become the safest and healthiest city in the United States. However, substance misuse remains one of the top concerns for our community, pointed to in both health needs assessments and community conversations. Substance misuse and related addiction is having a negative emotional and financial impact on our city.

In the fall of 2018, AHD set out to better understand the data and community understanding of the substance misuse problem. The purpose of this assessment is to provide in one location a collection of the quantitative and qualitative data, literature and potential policy recommendations available to our community. The data is the most current available. Where access to local level data was available, it was included. This goal of this report is to encourage dialogue, establish strategies, and create pathways to successful regulatory changes. Ultimately, AHD seeks to encourage the community to better understand how substance misuse, specifically the eight findings below, are impacting us.

This assessment would not have been possible without the partnership with the Alaska National Guard Counterdrug Support Program, State of Alaska Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention, Project HOPE, Volunteers of America, Healthy Voices Healthy Choices Coalition and Recover Alaska.

The MOA Health and Human Services Commission was integral in the policy analysis and prioritization process, which will shape and advance policies to help address some of the substance use issues in our community.

We would like to thank the staff at the Anchorage Health Department, many community partners, agencies, organizations, community groups, and individuals that generously contributed their time, energy, and knowledge to this assessment. Your expertise, insight, and dedication are deeply appreciated.

It will take the whole community working together to change the current trends and consequences associated with substance misuse.

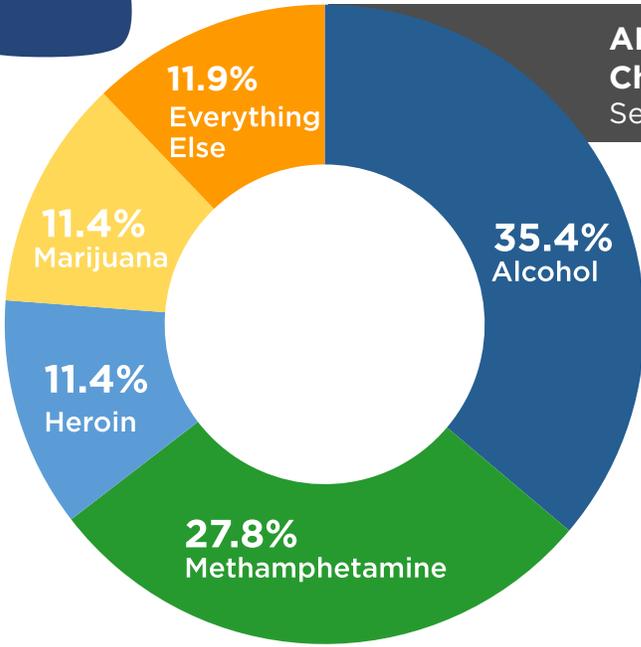
## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Alcohol is the substance of highest use and misuse in Anchorage.
2. Preliminary 2018 mortality data indicates decreases in all drug overdose mortality citywide.
3. Methamphetamine on the rise.
4. Addiction rates of Alaskan youth are the highest in the nation.
5. Anchorage high school students primarily misuse alcohol, vapes (either flavoring, nicotine, or marijuana), marijuana, tobacco, and prescription medicine.
6. Stigma surrounding substance use and addiction is high in the community.
7. The lack of behavioral and psychiatric health services exacerbates the substance misuse crisis.
8. There is a lack of substance misuse treatment options in Anchorage.

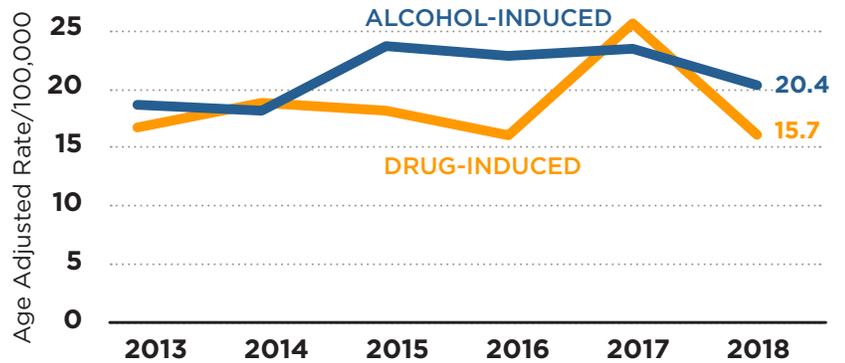
# ALCOHOL IS THE SUBSTANCE OF HIGHEST USE AND MISUSE IN ANCHORAGE.

Alcohol use among youth has been decreasing nationally as well as in Alaska and Anchorage for over 10 years and Anchorage adult consumption rates of alcohol mirror national rates. However, alcohol is still the substance of highest use and misuse in the community, and the rates of alcohol addiction and alcohol-induced mortality are higher in Anchorage than they are nationally. Alcohol use disorder is the most common form of addiction among Alaskans age 18 and older.

## ANCHORAGE OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES: Characteristics in all substantiated intake assessments Sept. 2018 - Feb. 2019

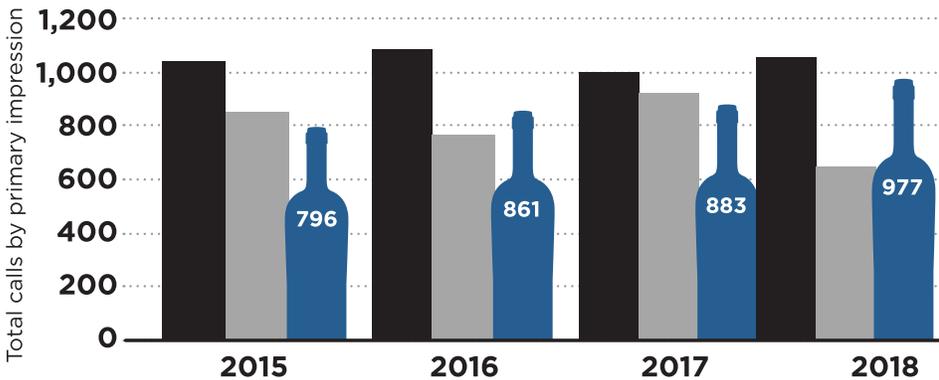


## ANCHORAGE DRUG- AND ALCOHOL-INDUCED MORTALITY RATE



\*Chart sources on page 7

## AFD EMS: Total Calls by Primary Impression



Behavioral/Psychiatric Disorder  
Poisoning/drug ingestion & substance/drug abuse  
Chief complaint is alcohol intoxication & nothing else

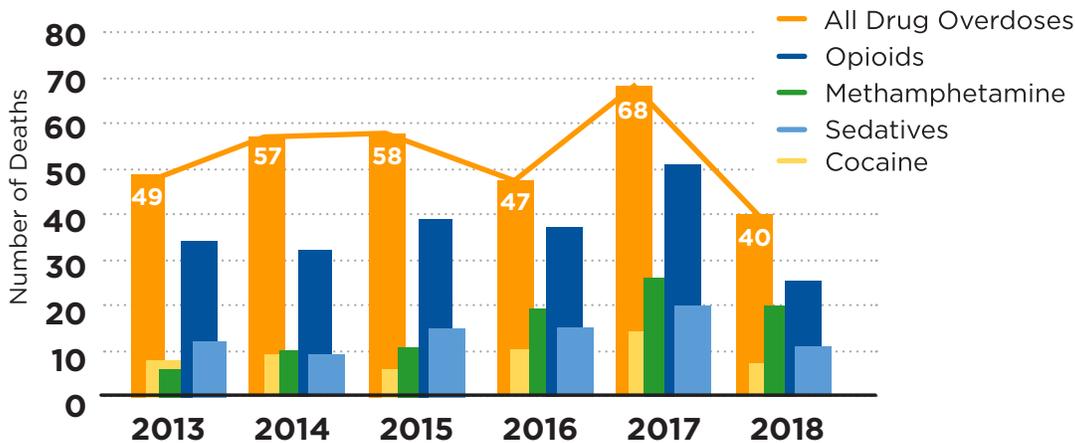
“Addiction is a chronic relapsing brain disease. People argue that you have a choice and that it is a moral issue. Not if your brain is hijacked.  
COMMUNITY HEALTH SPECIALIST

“Alcohol abuse tends to lose focus – it has been overshadowed by the opioid epidemic – but it is by far our biggest problem. FIRST RESPONDER

## PRELIMINARY 2018 MORTALITY DATA INDICATES DECREASES IN ALL DRUG OVERDOSE MORTALITY CITYWIDE.

Preliminary data suggests that all drug overdose mortality fell significantly in Anchorage from 2017-2018. It appears that prescription opioid misuse is declining in the city, but there is little evidence to suggest that heroin or synthetic opioid use and misuse are declining.

### ANCHORAGE MUNICIPALITY RESIDENTS: Drug Overdose Mortality

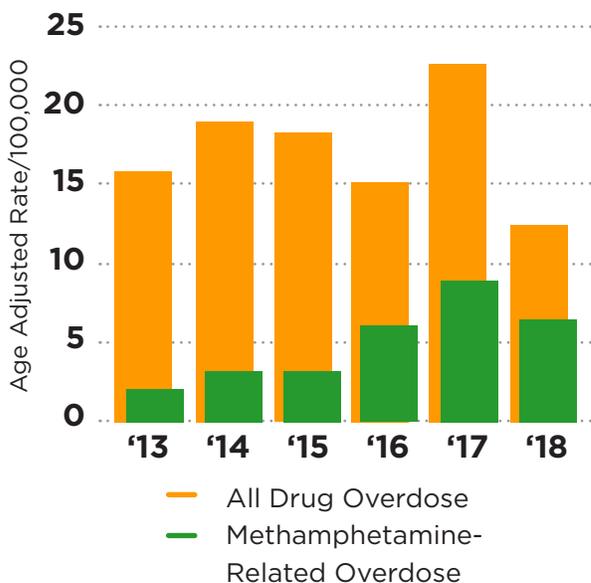


It is difficult to point precisely to one factor that can explain these decreases in overdose mortality in 2018. However, Narcan (the opioid overdose reversal medication) distribution, decreasing opioid prescription rates, increased awareness around opioid addiction in the community, and the possibly lower levels of Fentanyl in Alaska (compared to other parts of the nation) may have all contributed.

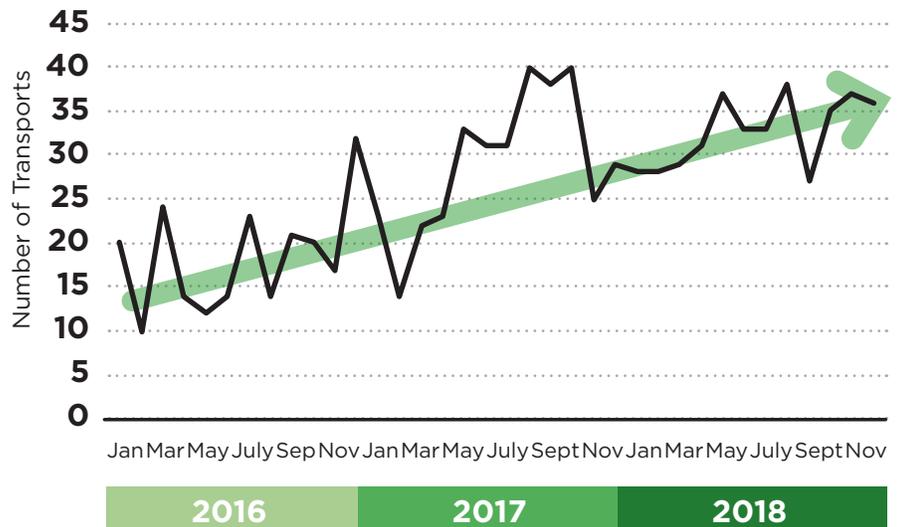
## METHAMPHETAMINE USE IS ON THE RISE.

From 2013-2018, the methamphetamine-related overdose mortality rate in the city rose 233%, while all other drug mortality rates declined over this period (after a spike in 2017).

### Anchorage Methamphetamine & All Drug Overdose Mortality Rates



### AFD EMS: Methamphetamine Transports in Anchorage Municipality





# ADDICTION RATES OF ALASKAN YOUTH ARE THE HIGHEST IN THE NATION.

Alaska had the highest rate in the nation of substance use disorder (SUD) in 2016-2017 among 12-17 year olds. Even when alcohol is removed from the category of substance use disorder, Alaska had the highest estimated rate of illicit drug use disorder among 12-17 year olds. While alcohol use disorder is the most common form of addiction among Alaskans 18 and older, the data indicates that illicit drugs and marijuana play a larger role in SUDs among youth in the state.

**Substance Use Disorder in Past Year, Age 12-17: Top 5 States (2016-17)**

<b>#1 Alaska</b>	<b>6.54%</b>
#2 Montana	6.30%
#3 New Mexico	6.01%
#4 Colorado	5.60%
#5 South Dakota	5.59%

**Substance Use Disorder** is defined as meeting criteria for illicit drug dependence or abuse based on DSM-IV definitions. **Includes:** alcohol, prescription psychotherapies, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, methamphetamine.

**Illicit Drug Use Disorder in Past Year, Age 12-17: Top 5 States (2016-17)**

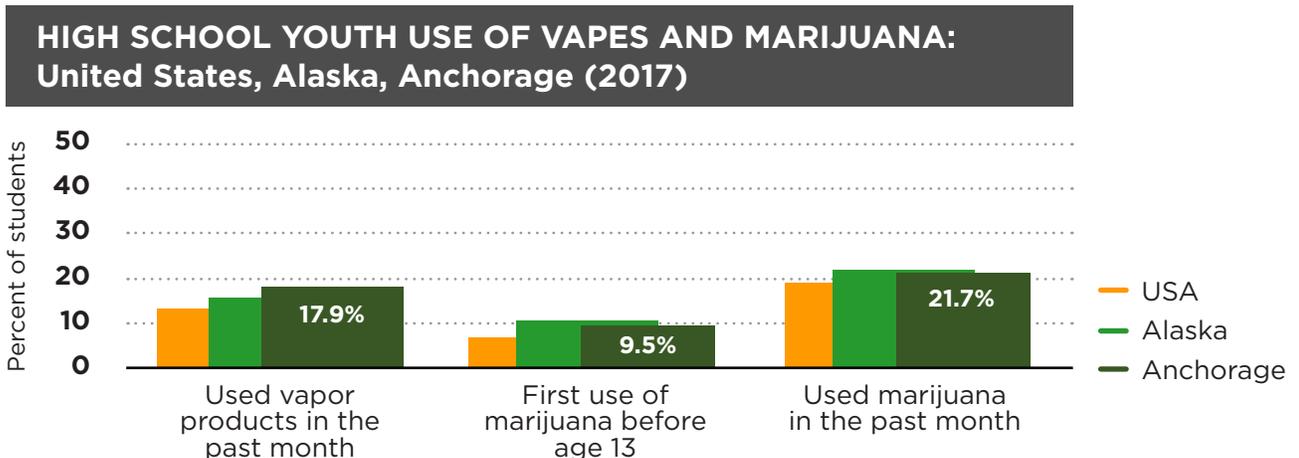
<b>#1 Alaska</b>	<b>4.55%</b>
#2 Nevada	4.17%
#3 Washington	4.16%
#4 New Mexico	4.11%
#5 Vermont	3.99%

**Illicit Drug Use Disorder** is defined as meeting criteria for illicit drug dependence or abuse based on DSM-IV definitions. **Includes:** prescription psychotherapies, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, methamphetamine.

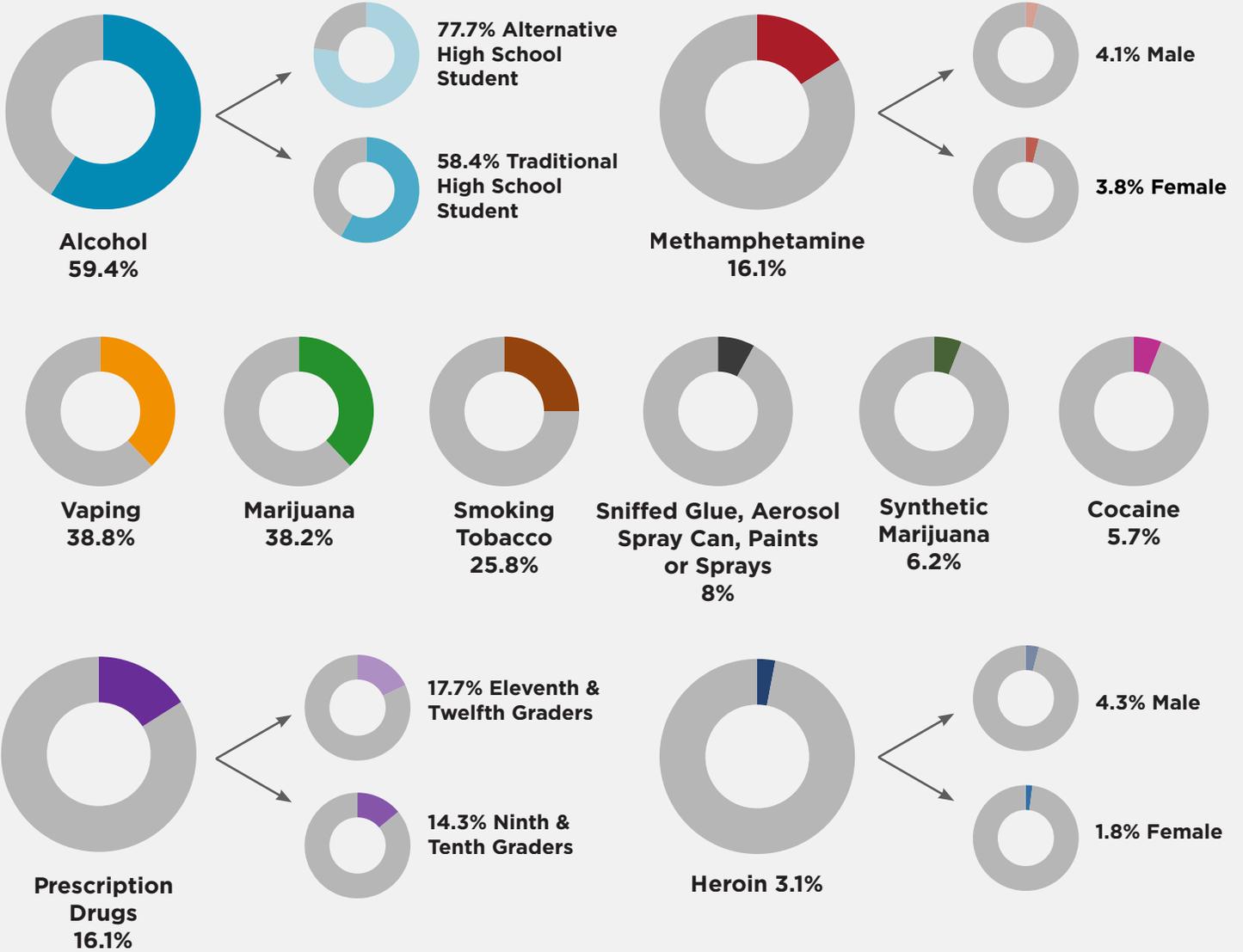


## ANCHORAGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS PRIMARILY MISUSE ALCOHOL, VAPES, MARIJUANA, TOBACCO & PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE.

Mirroring national trends, alcohol use among Anchorage youth has been declining for over a decade while electronic cigarette (vape) usage appeared in teenage populations within the last several years. Marijuana use is increasing in the Municipality among both high school students and adults, and the use of prescription opioids and benzodiazepines is prevalent among youth.



# 2017 ANCHORAGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: Ever Used or Tried in Lifetime



## STIGMA SURROUNDING SUBSTANCE USE AND ADDICTION IS HIGH IN THE COMMUNITY.

Stigma around substance use takes many forms and manifests in nuanced ways in Anchorage. This includes significant stigma around syringe services programs, medication assisted treatment, Narcan, and addiction in general as a moral failing. **Stigma prevents people from accessing treatment and can isolate individuals and families.**



There's a misconception that they will use as much heroin as possible just to go to the edge, then use Narcan to reverse the overdose. Most patients here aren't getting high, they are using enough not to get sick.

TREATMENT PROVIDER

# THE LACK OF BEHAVIORAL AND PSYCHIATRIC HEALTH SERVICES EXACERBATES THE SUBSTANCE MISUSE CRISIS.

Alaska has a high rate of suicide mortality and suicide ideation, and Alaskans experience higher rates of serious mental illness than the national average. **There is a wide gap between the number of people experiencing mental health crises and the number of people receiving mental health services.**

This can complicate and reinforce substance use and addiction in Anchorage, as substance misuse can both be a coping mechanism for mental illness as well as cause or exacerbate existing behavioral health issues.

## THERE IS A LACK OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE TREATMENT OPTIONS IN ANCHORAGE.

This lack of services is not universal; for some substances of misuse and some demographics, assessment, detox, and treatment are more readily available. However, generally speaking the city lacks treatment providers, diverse treatment modalities, and treatment services that can treat co-occurring addiction and mental health issues.



It's the exception rather than the rule that someone knows where to go, takes the step, and there is treatment available without delay. There are so many steps and places for people to trip.

MENTAL HEALTH POLICY ADVISOR

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**FINDING:** Alcohol is the substance of highest use and misuse in Anchorage

**POLICY:** Enact a 5% retail tax on alcohol

**POLICY:** Do not support increases in alcohol outlet sales hours

**FINDING:** Polysubstance use and misuse is high

**POLICY:** Anchorage Health Department will enact a policy that allows for Narcan distribution

**FINDING:** SUD rates of Alaskan youth are among the highest in the nation

**POLICY:** Enact a Tobacco 21 Ordinance

**POLICY:** Invest in free or inexpensive extracurricular activities for youth

**FINDING:** The lack of behavioral and psychiatric health services exacerbates the substance misuse crisis

**POLICY:** Allocate funding for a crisis stabilization center

**FINDING:** There is a lack of substance misuse treatment options in Anchorage

**POLICY:** Anchorage Health Department will enact a Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) policy

**POLICY:** Issue a resolution in support of the development of true housing first options in Anchorage

**POLICY:** Pursue funding for the Alaska Center for Treatment project

**FINDING:** Stigma surrounding substance use and addiction is high in the community

**POLICY:** Require official municipal language to be in line with recognized best practice

**POLICY:** Require municipal employees to attend training on trauma and cultural competency

## CHART SOURCES

**Page 2 - Anchorage Office of Children's Services Chart:** Anchorage Office of Children's Services. Everything else: Cocaine, Fentanyl, Oxycodone, K2/Spice, Methadone/Suboxone, Ecstasy/MDMA, Benzodiazepines

**Page 2 - Anchorage Drug and Alcohol-Induced Mortality Rate Chart:** Alaska Health Analytics and Vital Statistics Anchorage Drug Overdose Data 2013-2018; Alaska Vital Statistics 2017 Annual Report. Drug induced deaths include ICD-10 codes in the underlying cause of death: D521, D590, D592, D611, D642, E064, E160, E231, E242, E273, E661, F110-F115, F117-F119, F120-F125, F127-F129, F130-F135, F137-F139, F140-F145, F147-F149, F150-F155, F157-F159, F160-F165, F167-F169, F170, F173-F175, F177-F179, F180-F185, F187-F189, F190-F195, F197-F199, G211, G240, G251, G254, G256, G444, G620, G720, I952, J702, J703, J704, L105, L270, L271, M102, M320, M804, M814, M835, M871, R502, R781, R782, R783, R784, R785, X40-X44, X60-X64, X85, Y10-Y14. Alcohol-induced deaths include ICD-10 codes in the underlying cause of death: E244, F10, G312, G621, G721, I42.6, K292, K70, K852, K860, R780, X45, X65, Y15. *\*2018 data is preliminary and subject to change*

**Page 2 - AFD/EMS: Total Calls by Primary Impression Chart:** Anchorage Fire Department

**Page 3 - Anchorage Municipality Residents Drug Overdose Mortality Chart:** Alaska Health Analytics and Vital Statistics Anchorage Drug Overdose Data 2013-2018. Overdose deaths include ICD-10 codes in the underlying cause of death: X40-X44, X60-X64, X85, Y10-Y14. *\*2018 data is preliminary and subject to change. \*\*Overdose deaths can fall into more than one category and may add up to more than the total number of overdoses.*

**Page 3 - Anchorage Methamphetamine & All Drug Overdose Mortality Rates Chart:** Alaska Health Analytics and Vital Records Anchorage Drug Overdose Data 2013-18. Overdose deaths include ICD-10 codes with underlying cause of death: X-40-X44, X60-X64, X85, T10-Y14. Overdose deaths can fall under more than one drug category and may add up to more than the total number of overdoses. *\*2018 data is preliminary and subject to change*

**Page 3 - AFD EMS Methamphetamine Transports in Anchorage Municipality Chart:** Anchorage Fire Department. Patients transported by AFD EMS with self-reported or suspected methamphetamine use; includes transports of patients self-reporting or with signs and symptoms of methamphetamine withdrawals.

**Page 4 - SUD in Past Year Chart:** National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2016-17.

**Page 4 - Illicit Drug Use Disorder in Past Year Chart:** National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2016-17.

**Page 4 - High School Youth Use of Vapes and Marijuana: United States, Alaska, Anchorage (2017) Chart:** Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System; CDC Trends in Prevalence of Marijuana, Cocaine, and Other Illegal Drug Use National YRBS 1991-2017

**Page 5 - Anchorage High School Students: Ever Used or Tried in Lifetime Charts:** Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. *\*The question on vaping products was introduced into the survey in 2015. \*\*In 2015 the question on prescription drugs changed from "ever taken a prescription drug without a prescription" to "have taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told them one or more times during their lifetime*



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