Demographic Risk Factors for Opioid Overdose
Handout 2

Certain demographic characteristics may place an individual at increased risk for opioid overdose and related substance misuse. This resource summarizes findings from research literature on demographic risk factors.

GENDER

- **Male.** Being male is associated with increased overdose risk\(^1\,^2\,^3\,^4\,^5\) and risk of opioid abuse or dependence.\(^6\,^7\,^8\)
- **Female.** Overdose rates for women are increasing faster than male rates.\(^3\,^9\) Women receiving Medicaid\(^3\) and women after prison release\(^11\) are at increased risk for overdose.

AGE

- **Ages 45-54.** Increased overdose risk is associated with individuals between the ages of 45 and 54.\(^1\)
- **Ages 18-25.** Increased opioid dependence or abuse risk is associated with individuals between the ages of 18 and 25.\(^7\)
- **Ages 18-64.** Increased risk for opioid abuse is associated with individuals between the ages of 18 and 64.\(^12\)
- **Middle Age.** Being “middle age” is associated with increased overdose risk\(^2\,^9\,^13\) and opioid abuse or dependence.\(^6\)
- **Older Age.** Being “older age” is associated with increased overdose risk in some studies\(^3\,^14\) and decreased overdose risk in other studies.\(^3\) Older adults who are privately insured are associated with decreased overdose risk.\(^3\) Older adults who use illicit opioids and injected drugs are associated with increased overdose risk.\(^15\,^16\)

RACE

- **Non-Hispanic White.** Being white (non-Hispanic) is associated with increased overdose risk\(^1\,^2\,^3\,^4\,^13\) and risk of opioid abuse or dependence.\(^7\). White individuals who use injected drugs are associated with increased overdose risk.\(^16\)
- **All Races:** Deaths from heroin overdose have increased in the past decade among non-Hispanic white, black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian individuals. The most significant increases were among non-Hispanic white, Native American and black—rates more than quadrupled between 2010 and 2014 among these four groups\(^17\,^18\).
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

- **Rural.** Living in a rural setting is associated with increased overdose risk.²,⁹,¹³
- **Urban.** Living in an urban setting is associated with increased overdose risk¹⁹ and risk of opioid abuse or dependence.⁷

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

- **Low Income.** Former prison inmates with low incomes are at increased risk for overdose.²⁰
  *(NOTE: Data is from a qualitative study.)*

HOUSING STATUS

- **Lack of Permanent Housing.** Individuals without permanent housing are associated with an increased risk for opioid dependence or abuse.⁷

EDUCATION LEVEL

- **Low Education Level.** Individuals with less education are associated with increased risk for overdose *(NOTE: Study looked only at participants from a syringe program in Seattle).*²¹

MARITAL STATUS

- **Not Married.** Individuals who are not married are associated with an increased risk of overdose.¹³

VETERAN STATUS

- **Veterans Receiving Opioids and Benzodiazepines.** Veterans who are concurrently prescribed benzodiazepines and opioids are at increased risk for overdose.²²
- **Veterans with Mental Health Disorders.** Veterans with mental health disorders, including PTSD, are more likely to be prescribed opioid pain relievers and are more likely to experience adverse clinical outcomes (including overdose).²³

LGBT STATUS

- **Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Youth and Adults.** LGB youth and adults are at increased risk for substance use, including heroin.²⁴

DRUG USE STATUS

- **Injection Drugs.** Individuals who inject drugs are at increased risk for overdose and other adverse health outcomes.²⁵
REFERENCES