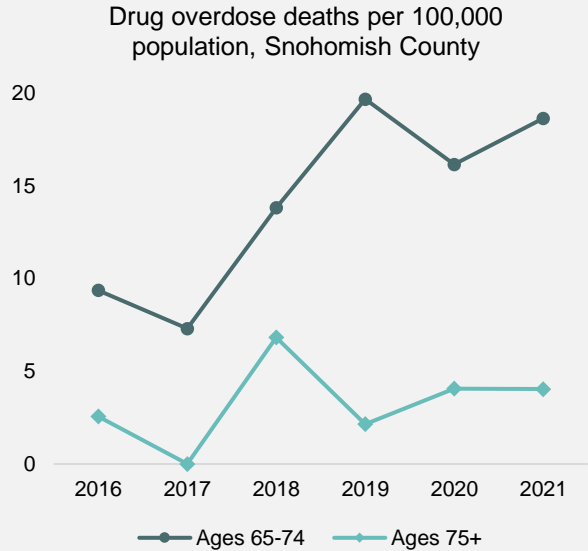




Older Adults and Substance Use Data Brief

Impacts of problematic substance use are on the rise among adults ages 65 and older. In Snohomish County, between the years 2016 and 2021, **the annual rate of overdose deaths among adults ages 65-74 doubled** from 9.4 to 18.7 per 100,000. Much of this increase is attributable to fentanyl and methamphetamine use. However, prescription pain medication remains a major contributor to older adults' overdose morbidity and mortality ([Washington State Department of Health](#)).

Drug overdose deaths of older adults (65+) in Snohomish County are more likely to involve prescription opioids. From 2019-2022, **overdose deaths among older adults were 79.2% more likely to list prescription opioids** as the cause of death than an all-ages comparison. Deaths among this population are **nearly three times more likely to be men than women** (74.5% of drug overdose deaths were men in 2019-2022 – [WA DOH](#)).



The rate of drug overdose deaths among adults ages 65-74 **doubled** in Snohomish County from 2016 to 2021.

Older adults tend to have a more complicated medical history as a normal part of aging. They are also more likely to be prescribed opioid pain medication ([Prescription Drug Monitoring Program](#)). It's important for health care professionals to be mindful of the risk of prescribing and mixing drugs, a practice that can lead to dependence or accidental overdose.

Substance use and substance use disorder (SUD) pose unique risks to older adults. As people age, their kidney and liver functions slow, which allows medications to remain in their system longer. Opioid use increases the risk of falls, fractures, and disability. It can also lead to sedation and other cognitive impairment. Research shows this population does well once enrolled in care for SUD and are good candidates for long-term recovery ([Drugs & Aging](#); [NEJM](#)).

Other risk factors that contribute to increased risk of SUD include real or perceived social isolation, experiencing the loss of loved ones, or sudden changes to lifestyle such as forced retirement ([National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)).

- Risk factors for substance use disorder in older adults include:**
- ✦ Chronic pain conditions
 - ✦ Physical disabilities
 - ✦ Reduced mobility
 - ✦ Transitions in living or care situations
 - ✦ Loss of loved ones
 - ✦ Forced retirement
 - ✦ Change in income
 - ✦ Poor health status
 - ✦ Concurrent medications
 - ✦ Social isolation
 - ✦ Increased risk of falls

For more information on how to get no-cost naloxone (Narcan), visit: stopoverdose.org

For information on how to safely dispose of old, expired, or unused medications, call the Safe Medication Return program at: 844-482-5322 or visit: medtakebackwashington.org