**Fiscal Facts: More Young Adult Lives Lost in Wisconsin, Even as Death Rates Down for Older Adults**

More Wisconsinites are dying in the prime of life, from causes that chiefly include COVID-19 or drug overdoses. At the same time, there is another encouraging mortality trend: Wisconsinites in older age groups are dying at lower rates.

Over the last two decades, Wisconsin and the nation have seen marked declines in three leading causes of mortality: heart disease, cancer, and cerebrovascular disease such as stroke, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show. This has contributed to a sizable decline, from 2001 to 2021, in death rates among Wisconsinites ages 65 and up -- despite a recent uptick in mortality due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Still, these developments exist alongside a darker reality for younger people: by 2021, in Wisconsin and nationally, people had become much more likely to die in their 20s, 30s, or 40s. This is due in part to a new cause of death that has affected all age groups: COVID-19.

An even larger driver of this trend is the increase in drug overdose deaths. In Wisconsin and nationally, these are now linked primarily to fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that can be found mixed with many other drugs.

Focusing between the ages of 25 and 44, where the change appears most acute: in Wisconsin and nationally, their rates of death increased sharply from 2001 to 2021. By five-year age cohort, the largest percentage increase in mortality rate, both in Wisconsin and nationally, was for ages 30-34. The mortality rate for this age group in Wisconsin rose by 137% over the two decades.

Mortality rates also increased during this period for the age cohorts of 25-29 (+80%), 35-39 (+72%), and 40-44 (+57%). In total, there were more than 1,100 more deaths among Wisconsin adults ages 25 to 44 in 2021 than in 2001. While mortality also increased for all of these age cohorts nationally, the proportional increase in Wisconsin was larger.

Over the last two decades, overdose deaths – primarily opioid overdoses — accounted for well over half of Wisconsin’s mortality rate increase for each of the five-year age cohorts from age 20 to 49. Especially for ages 25-44, overdose fatalities increased much more sharply in Wisconsin than nationally.

An additional trend specific to our state finds Black Wisconsinites experiencing higher rates of mortality than Black Americans nationally from causes such as drug overdoses and homicides. In 2021, the overdose mortality rate for Black Wisconsinites (91.5 per 100,000) was more than twice the rate for all Black Americans (42.9). Meanwhile the overdose mortality rate for white, non-Hispanic Wisconsinites (27.3) was less than the rate for white Americans (35.0). We see a similar pattern among homicide deaths.

The contrasting trends in mortality by age examined here offer a striking look at how Wisconsin is making progress in outcomes for some – but losing ground among those who should expect to have many years to live.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*