



HEALTH OF BOSTON DATA UPDATE 2024

DRUG AND OPIOID MORTALITY BY RACE/ETHNICITY: 2019-2023

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FOREWORD

This Health of Boston Data Update 2024 presents newly available Boston resident drug and opioid mortality data by race/ethnicity for 2019-2023 as a supplement to the [Health of Boston 2024 Substance Use and Disorders Report](#) released in May of 2024. The parent report highlights trends in rates of substance use-related hospitalizations and emergency department visits, admission to treatment for substance use disorder, use of substances among youth, and substance use mortality data through 2022.

Among the many findings presented, Health of Boston 2024 Substance Use and Disorders Report shows that from 2017 to 2022, substance use related mortality disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx residents of Boston. Black residents experienced the greatest increase in substance use related mortality (alcohol and drugs) compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Further, in 2022, Black residents experienced the highest rate of fatal overdoses from any drug when compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Similarly, Latinx residents experienced significantly higher rates of fatal opioid related overdoses than White residents in 2022.

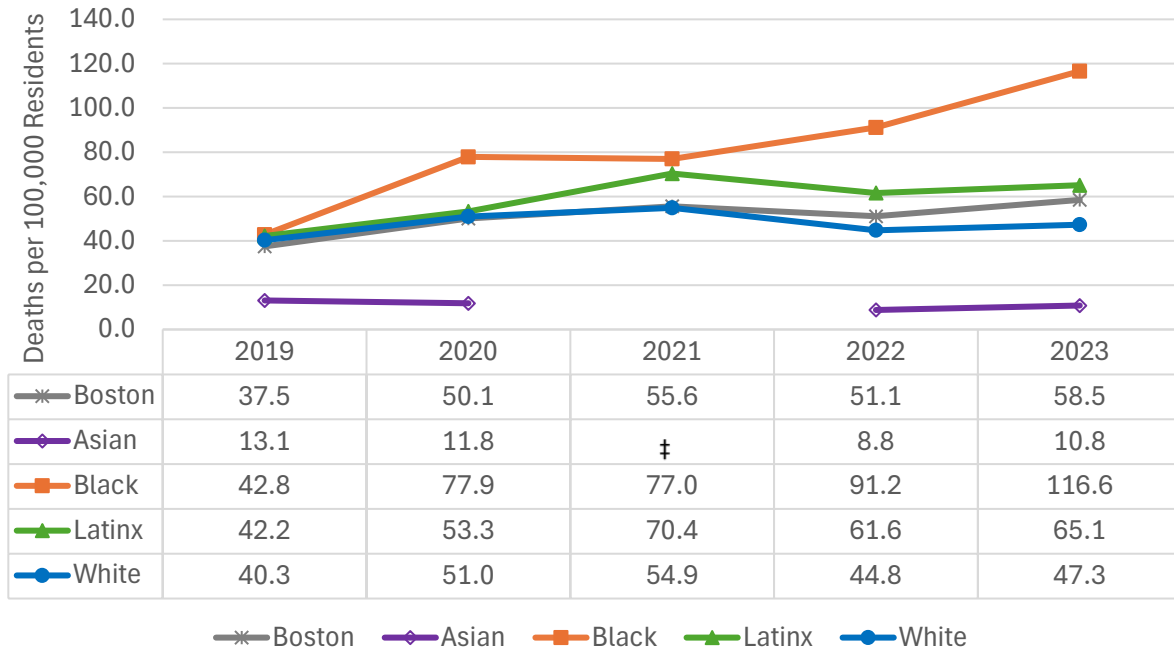
Given the importance of addressing the ongoing opioid epidemic and related racial/ethnic health inequities, BPHC is providing updated mortality rates for opioid and drug use to include deaths among Boston residents during 2023. While these data are still “preliminary” until fully verified by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, we believe this update provides residents, medical and public health professionals, policy makers, and community advocates with additional understanding of the substance use experience of Boston residents. We will provide future updates as data are finalized and available for analysis.

Please see [Health of Boston 2024 Substance Use and Disorders Report](#) for data definitions, technical notes, and description of analytical methods.

SUGGESTED CITATION: Boston Public Health Commission, Health of Boston 2024 Data Update: Drug and Opioid Mortality by Race/Ethnicity 2019-2023 (Boston, Massachusetts 2024)



Figure 1. Drug Mortality† by Race/Ethnicity and Year, Boston Residents, 2019-2023



†Age-adjusted rates per 100,000 residents

‡Rates for Asian residents in 2021 are not presented due to a small number of cases (n<5) during these years.

NOTE: Hollowed-out symbols represent rates based on 20 or fewer cases and should be interpreted with caution. DATA SOURCE: Boston resident deaths, Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Please be advised that 2022 and 2023 data are preliminary and subject to change. Raw preliminary data may be incomplete or inaccurate, have not been fully verified, and revisions are likely to occur following the production of these data. The Department of Public Health strongly cautions users regarding the accuracy of statistical analyses based on preliminary data and particularly with regard to small numbers of events.

Drug overdose mortality includes all deaths caused by poisoning from one or more drugs regardless of intentionality.

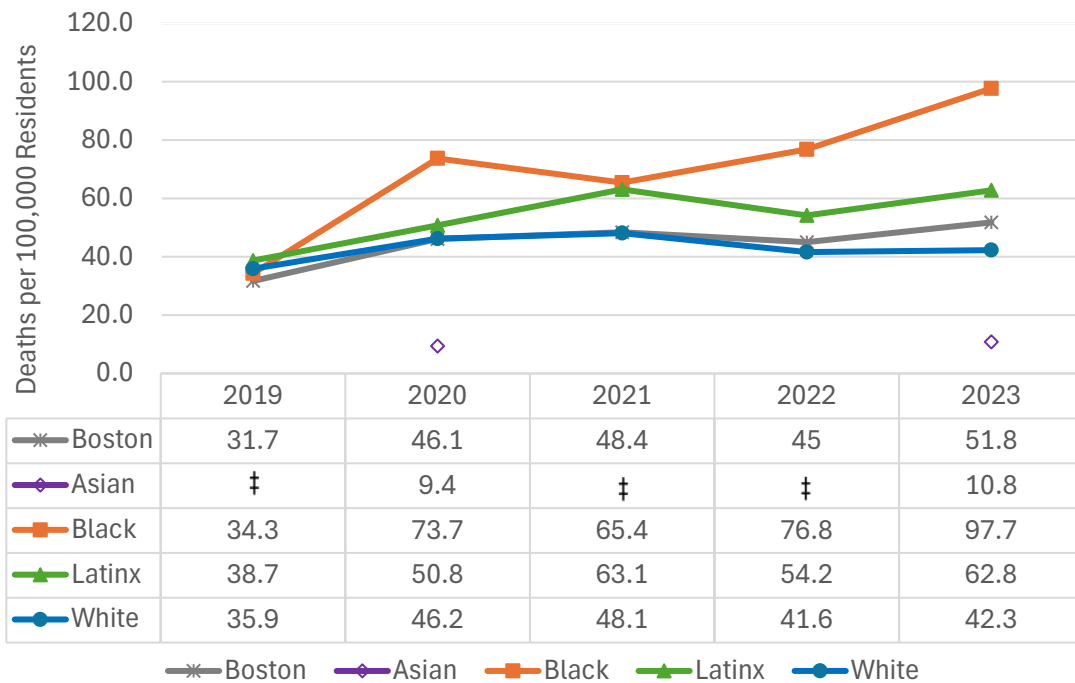
From 2019 to 2023, there was a 40.5% increase in the drug overdose mortality rate (age-adjusted per 100,000 residents) for Boston overall (Figure 1). During the five-year period, the rate increased 124.5% for Black residents and 44.2% for Latinx residents. The rates for Asian and White residents did not change significantly.



From 2022 to 2023, there was no significant change in the rate of drug overdose mortality among the racial/ethnic groups.

In 2023, the rate for Asian residents was 77.1% lower than the rate for White residents. The rate for Black residents was 146.8% higher and for Latinx residents 37.8% higher than for White residents.

Figure 2. Opioid Mortality† by Race/Ethnicity and Year, Boston Residents, 2019-2023



†Age-adjusted rates per 100,000 residents

‡Rates for Asian residents in 2019, 2021, and 2022 are not presented due to a small number of cases (n<5) during these years.

NOTE: Hollowed-out symbols represent rates based on 20 or fewer cases and should be interpreted with caution. DATA SOURCE: Boston resident deaths, Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Please be advised that 2022 and 2023 data are preliminary and subject to change. Raw preliminary data may be incomplete or inaccurate, have not been fully verified, and revisions are likely to occur following the production of these data. The Department of Public Health strongly cautions users regarding the accuracy of statistical analyses based on preliminary data and particularly with regard to small numbers of events.



Opioid overdose mortality, a subset of drug overdose mortality, includes all deaths caused by poisoning from one or more opioids, alone or in combination with other drugs, regardless of intentionality.

From 2019 to 2023, the opioid overdose mortality rate (age-adjusted per 100,000 residents) for Boston overall increased 41.8% (Figure 2). During the five-year period, the rate increased

113.8% for Black residents and 46.2% for Latinx residents; and did not change significantly for Asian and White residents.

From 2022 to 2023, there were no significant changes in the rates of opioid mortality among racial/ethnic groups.

In 2023, the Asian resident opioid overdose mortality rate was 74.4% lower than for White residents. The rates for Black residents and Latinx residents were 131.0% and 48.4% higher, respectively, than for White residents.