

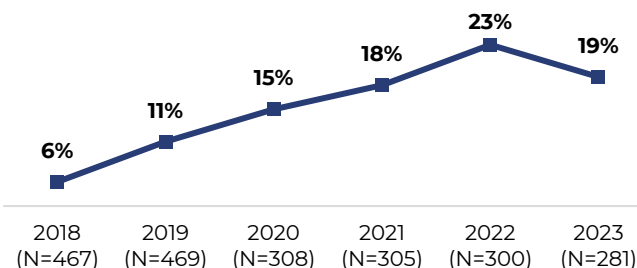
Notable Increase of Fentanyl Misuse Among Adults Booked into San Diego Jails Over Time

Illegally manufactured fentanyl has become a nationwide concern due to its potency and potential for overdose. As such, it has become increasingly important to study fentanyl usage patterns and motivations to help inform public health responses and harm reduction strategies. In 2023, incarcerated adults interviewed for the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program attributed nearly half of all reported drug overdoses to fentanyl. Most respondents were aware of the risks associated with fentanyl use, with a majority fearing overdose or fatal outcomes. Despite this awareness, nearly one in five reported ever misusing fentanyl and nearly one in three believed they had unintentionally consumed it due to adulteration. These and additional key findings can be found in the CJ Bulletin: [2023 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region](#).

Highlight 1: Nearly one in five reported fentanyl misuse

Despite a slight decrease of 4% from the year prior, nearly one in five (19%) individuals interviewed in 2023 reported the misuse of fentanyl,¹ making it the second most commonly misused prescription drug after tranquilizers. Unintentional fentanyl use is also a notable concern, as nearly one in three (32%) of all respondents reported suspecting that drugs they ever used had contained fentanyl due to their reaction to it.

Figure 1: Rates of fentanyl misuse over time (2018-2023)

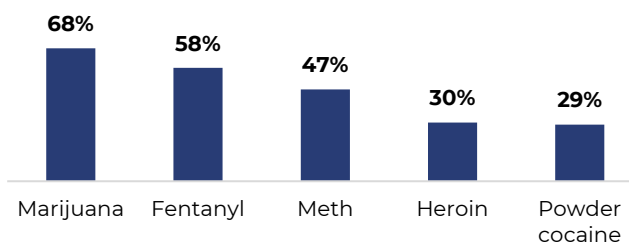


Source: SANDAG

Highlight 2: Fentanyl considered the second easiest substance to obtain, behind marijuana

More than one in ten (13%) of all respondents reported having fentanyl in their possession within 30 days of the time of interview (whether or not they consumed it). Of those, more than half (58%) described fentanyl as being “very easy” to obtain. Excluding marijuana, this was higher than all other substances.

Figure 2: Perception of substances as “very easy” to get



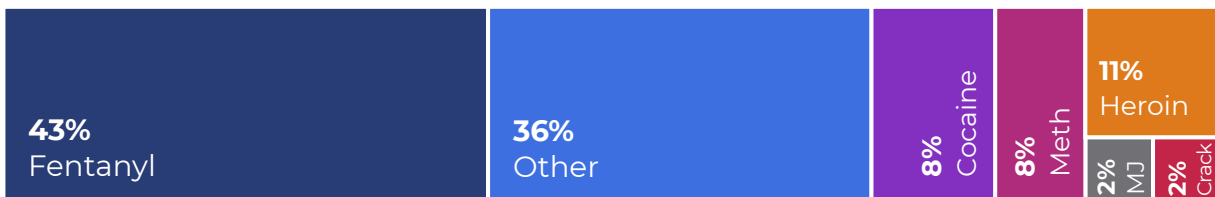
Source: SANDAG

¹ Although prescribed drugs can be misused (in a way that differs from prescribed guidelines), for the purpose of this research, misuse refers to using a drug without a valid prescription.

Highlight 3: Most reported overdoses were caused by fentanyl, and a majority of respondents are aware of its risks

Nearly one in five (19%) of all individuals interviewed reported a previous drug overdose. Of those, almost half (43%) said they had overdosed on fentanyl specifically. Conscious of these dangers, fentanyl risk awareness appears to be prevalent; a significant majority (91%) of all respondents said they would not purchase a drug if they knew it contained fentanyl, with most citing wanting to avoid overdose and fatality risks as reasons for their unwillingness (75%).

Figure 3: Rates of reported overdose per substance



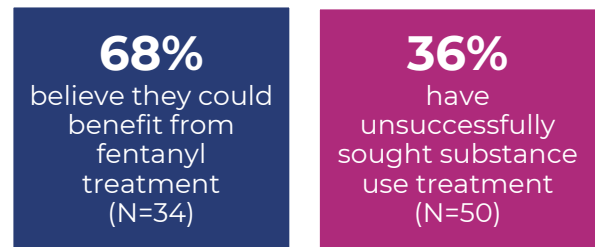
Notes: "Other" includes other prescription medications, hallucinogens, tranquilizers, and different combinations. Percentages are based on multiple responses and thus do not add to 100.

Source: SANDAG

Highlight 4: More than two in three that have misused fentanyl recognize their need for treatment

In addition to an overall high rate of fentanyl-related risk awareness among all interviewed individuals, more than one in three (36%) of those who reported misusing fentanyl said they had previously sought substance use treatment without success. When asked if they believe they could benefit from drug treatment at the time of interview, nearly three-fourths (73%) of those who reported misusing fentanyl responded affirmatively, with most (68%) stating they could benefit from fentanyl treatment specifically.

Figure 4: Desire for substance use treatment among fentanyl users in 2023



Source: SANDAG

