

# The Post-Journal

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## County Stats To Show Drop In Drug Use, Overdose Rates

County public and mental health officials expect to see a decrease in drug addiction cases and overdose-related deaths when the county's new Community Health Assessment is released later this year.

Rates of drug addiction and overdose-related deaths have historically risen every year but one in Chautauqua County from 2010 to 2020. The tide is turning, according to Lacey Wilson, county public health director, and Carmelo Hernandez, county director of community mental hygiene services and social services commissioner.

According to the "2022 Chautauqua County Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan" and the "Chautauqua County Substance Use Disorder Key Indicators" from 2022, the county had seen a continuous rise in usage rates, especially in cases involving opioid use. In 2021, the county saw a total of 55 overdose-related deaths, nearly double the number of overdoses-related deaths in 2018, which was 26. The increase in overdose-related deaths had been happening long before 2018, however, with a consistent increasing being able to be traced back to at least 2010. In 2010 there was a crude opioid death rate of less than five per 100,000. As of 2020 that number had reached 30.9 per 100,000 with only one year of overall decline in 2017 over the 10-year span.

Rates of usage and addiction in the county had not only long been on the rise, but also ranked significantly higher than most other parts of New York state. As a means of quantifying and comparing the total impact of opioid usage in an area the New York State Department of Health utilizes the "opioid burden metric" which the state said measures outpatient emergency department visits, hospital discharges for non-fatal opioid overdose, abuse, dependence, and unspecified use, as well as opioid overdose deaths.

In 2019 Chautauqua County scored a burden rate of 513.7 per 100,000, an increase from the 2016 score of 496.5. This rate was the highest in all of New York state for 2019, with the second-highest score being the Bronx with a score of 485.2. The state average in 2019 was 249.8.

“Since then, the county has experienced a 50% reduction in the rate of overdose fatalities from 2023 to 2024 — a culmination of environmental, infrastructural, social, and direct-to-individual interventions employed by national, state, and local not-for-profit organizations, government agencies, policymakers, and public and private institutions” Wilson told The Post-Journal.

The Post Journal was unable to view the reports as they are not yet publicly available and are due to be included in the next iteration of the CHA/CHIP assessment. Wilson said the new reports and data will be set to publicly release “by the end of this year, in accordance with the New York State Department of Health’s mandate requiring counties to conduct health assessments in collaboration with local hospitals and other community health partners.”

The information in this upcoming report should confirm Wilson’s statement of a decline in overdose rates, and thus likely addiction, in recent years.

Hernandez said much of this reduction in substance abuse has been aided by their efforts to expand naloxone access, rehabilitation services, and public education about the risks of drug usage but noted the importance of continuing to grow resources and advance their utilization from residents.

“While we have made progress, with overdose deaths in Chautauqua County dropping significantly last year, these recent losses highlight that our work is far from done.” Hernandez said.

Anyone looking to access more information on resources within the area or further data is encouraged to visit [combataddictionchq.com](http://combataddictionchq.com).

