

NDEWS *National Drug Early Warning System*

Funded at the Center for Substance Abuse Research by the National Institute on Drug Abuse

Atlanta Metro Sentinel Community Site (SCS) Drug Use Patterns and Trends, 2020

August 2020

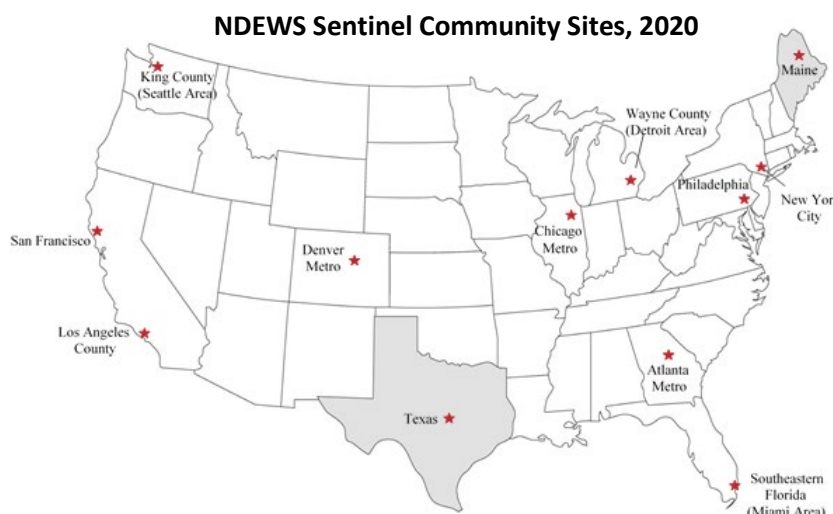
NDEWS Coordinating Center

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A unique feature of NDEWS is its capability to describe and compare drug use patterns and trends in selected communities across the United States. The NDEWS Coordinating Center works closely with Sentinel Community Epidemiologists (SCEs) in

12 Sentinel Community Sites (SCSs) across the U.S. Emerging drugs and changing drug trends are monitored by each local SCE utilizing indicators such as drug overdose deaths, treatment admissions, hospital cases, poison center exposure calls, and law enforcement seizures. **In May 2020, each SCE was asked to review available indicators and identify up to five drugs they considered most important to summarize for their site and include in their 2020 annual *Drug Use Patterns and Trends Report*.**



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National Drug Early Warning System (NDEWS) Atlanta Metro Sentinel Community Site (SCS) Drug Use Patterns and Trends, 2020

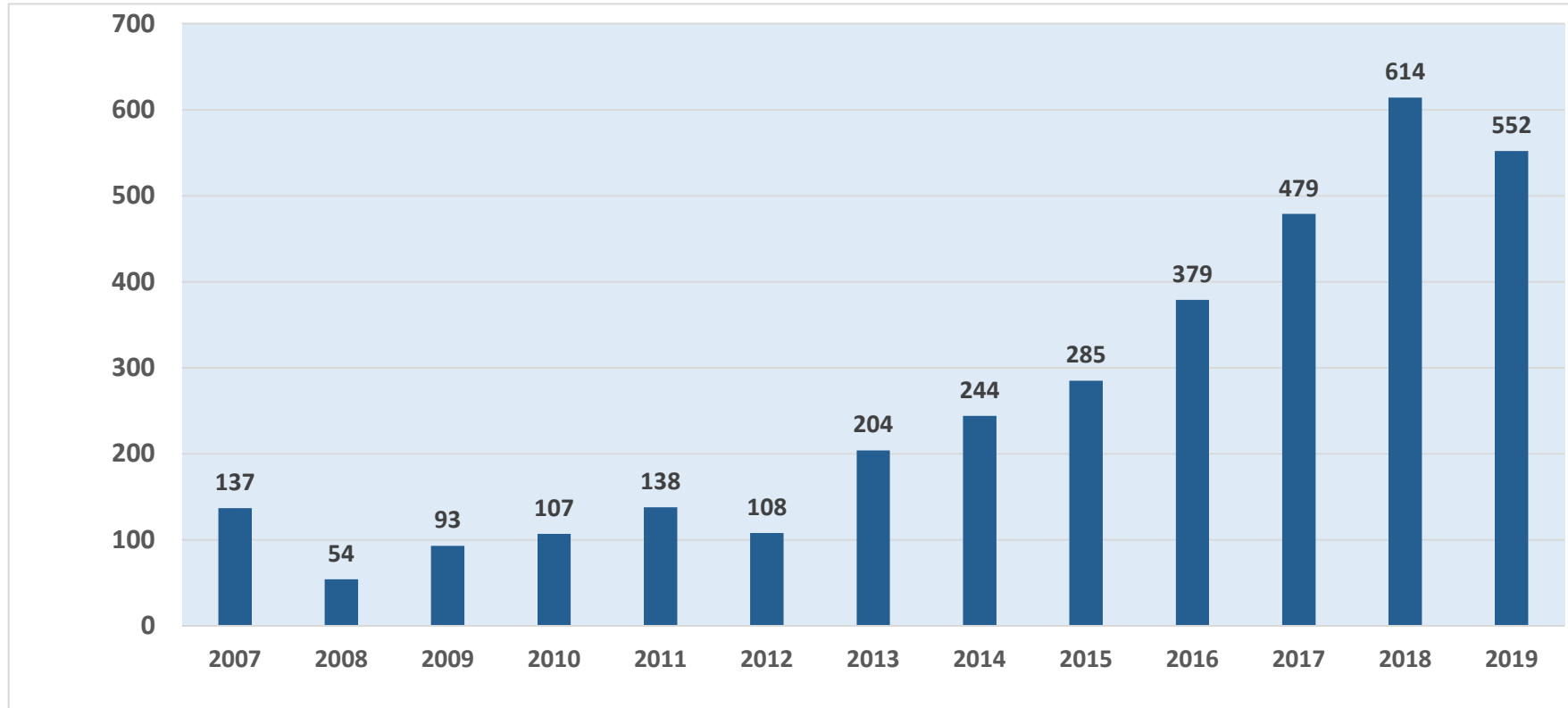
Brian J. Dew, Ph.D., Ned Golubovic, Ph.D., and Josh Castleberry, Ed.S.
Georgia State University

Highlights

- Multiple **methamphetamine** data indicators suggest a stable, if not slightly decreased, use of the drug (Georgia Poison Control Center, ethnographic reports, and Georgia Medical Examiner data).
- **Methamphetamine** is no longer confined to Atlanta's white population and continues to spread into the local African American and Hispanic communities.
- **Heroin** indicators are mixed. Statewide deaths with heroin on board are at a 4 year low, while the prevalence of **fentanyl** on-board deaths is at an all-time high (n= 300).
- Once dominant in Atlanta, the use of **cocaine/crack** is stable at rates below methamphetamine. Users are the oldest of any cohort, most likely to be African American, and smoking. There has been a slight decrease in Georgia Medical Examiner data from a 10-year high in 2017.
- The market for **marijuana** in Atlanta has changed more drastically than any local drug market with significantly less statewide production and greater reliance on high-level THC oils transported from Western states and Mexico.
- All major drug indicators for **alprazolam and other benzodiazepines** are down in 2019 compared with the previous 4 years. The existence of alprazolam in the Georgia mortality data reached its lowest level since 2008. Still the drug is most likely consumed by females and by users 25 years or younger.
- The rise of **prescription opiate use**, witnessed between 2011 and 2016, was mixed in 2019 compared with the previous two years. Poison control center calls showed an increasing trend statewide in 2019. Mortality data in 2019 was lower for oxycodone and hydrocodone products. The presence of fentanyl among decedents continued to increase to the highest level on record.

Methamphetamine

Number of Georgia Decedents with Methamphetamine on Board at Time of Death (2007-2019)

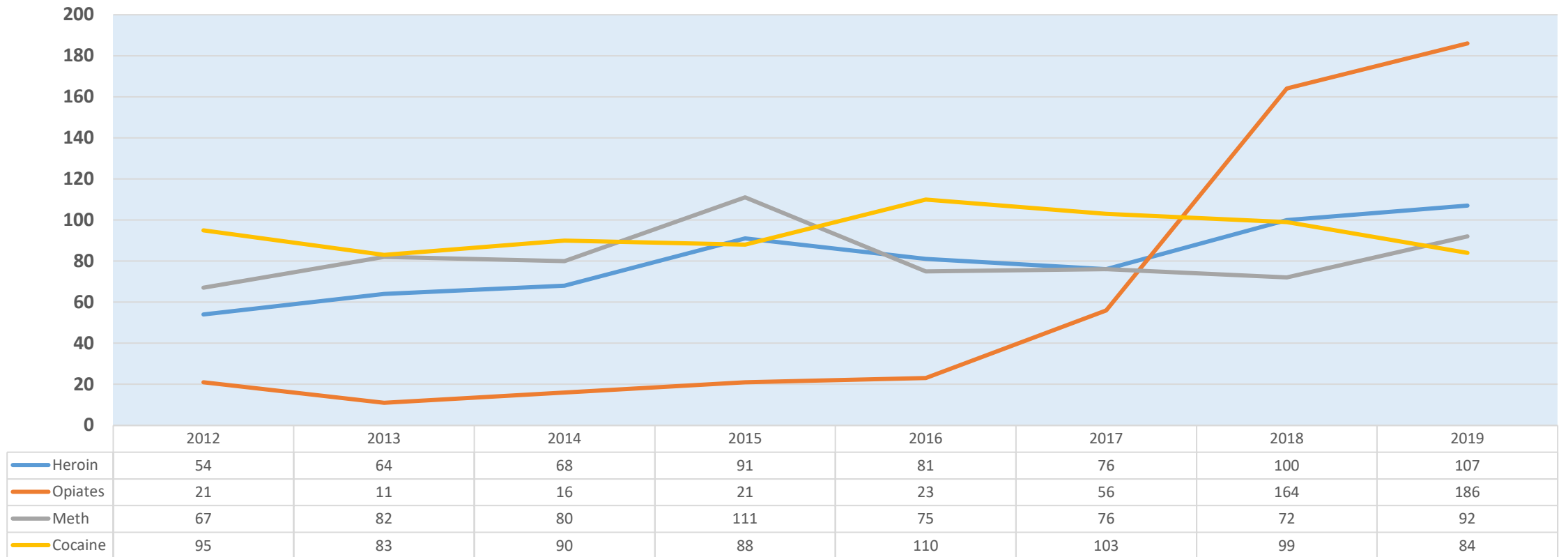


- The number of statewide decedents testing positive for methamphetamine at the time of death in 2019 indicated a 10.1% decrease from an all-time high in 2018.
- Supports multiple retail level reporting that increasing amounts of methamphetamine in Atlanta are being mixed and distributed, typically unknown to the buyer/user.

Source: Georgia Medical Examiner's Office

Prescription Opiates and Heroin

Number of Atlanta-Based Drug Calls to Georgia Poison Control Center (2012-2019)



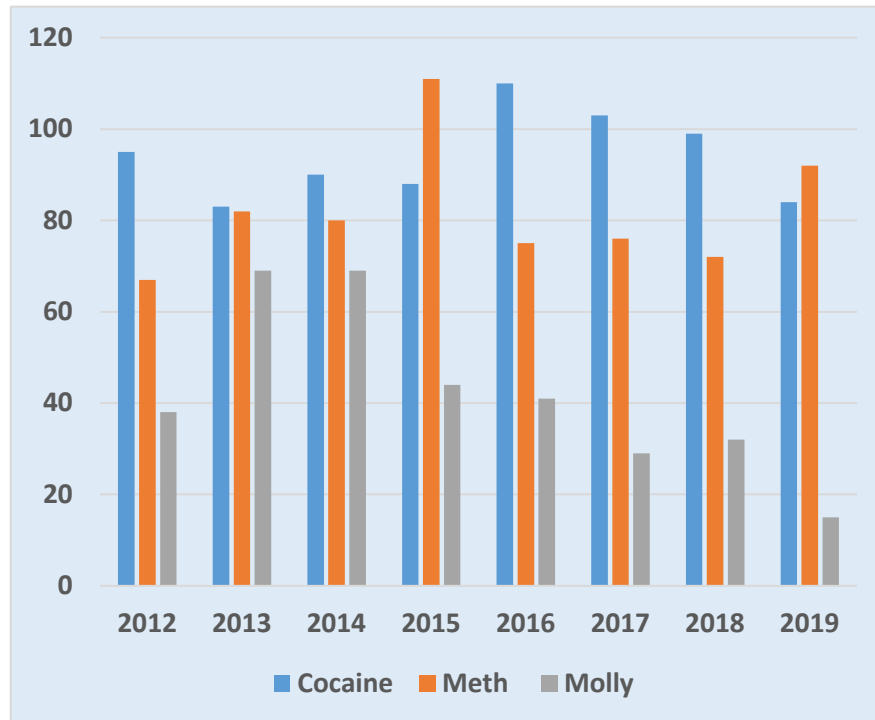
— Heroin — Opiates — Meth — Cocaine

- Atlanta has the lowest rates of heroin use of all major US cities (6% in 2018 of total primary treatment admits were for heroin).
- High levels of prescription opiates and heroin use are reported in statewide Medical Examiner mortality data.
- Users continued to be increasingly white and younger than 35 years old.
- Ethnographic reports cite an increasing supply of Mexican heroin into Metro Atlanta area.

Source: Georgia Poison Control Center

Crack and Cocaine HCL

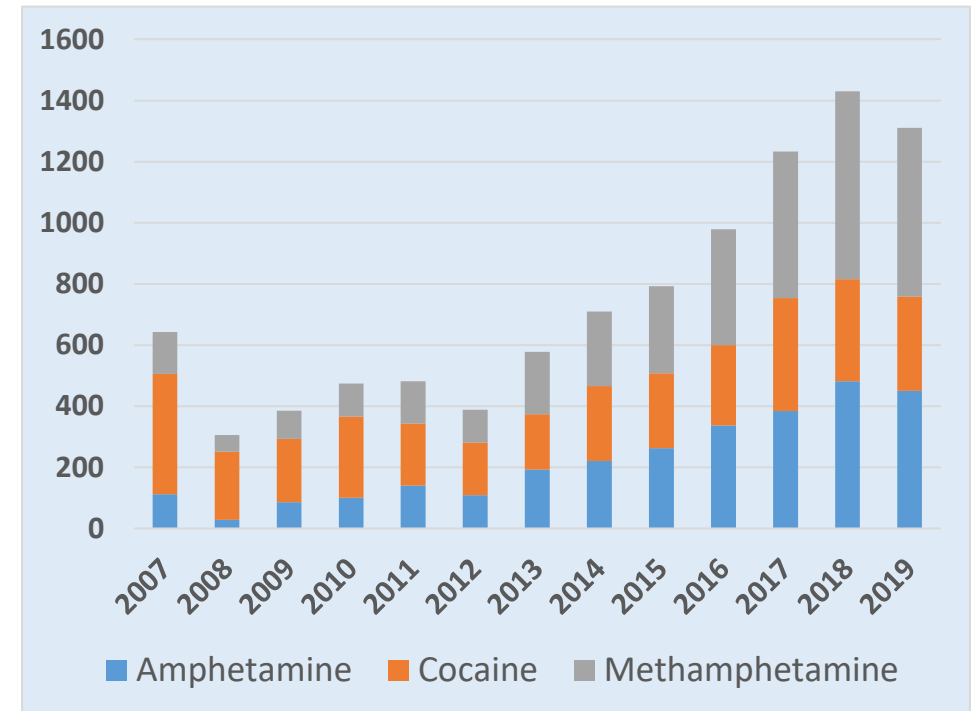
Number of Atlanta-Based Drug Calls to Georgia Poison Control Center (2012-2019)



- Cocaine users are most likely to be African American, greater than 45 years, and smoke
- Cocaine-related calls to the Georgia Poison Control Center typically exceed methamphetamine and molly calls in metro Atlanta. However, in 2019, the number of methamphetamine calls in metro Atlanta exceeded cocaine-related calls.

Source: Georgia Poison Control Center

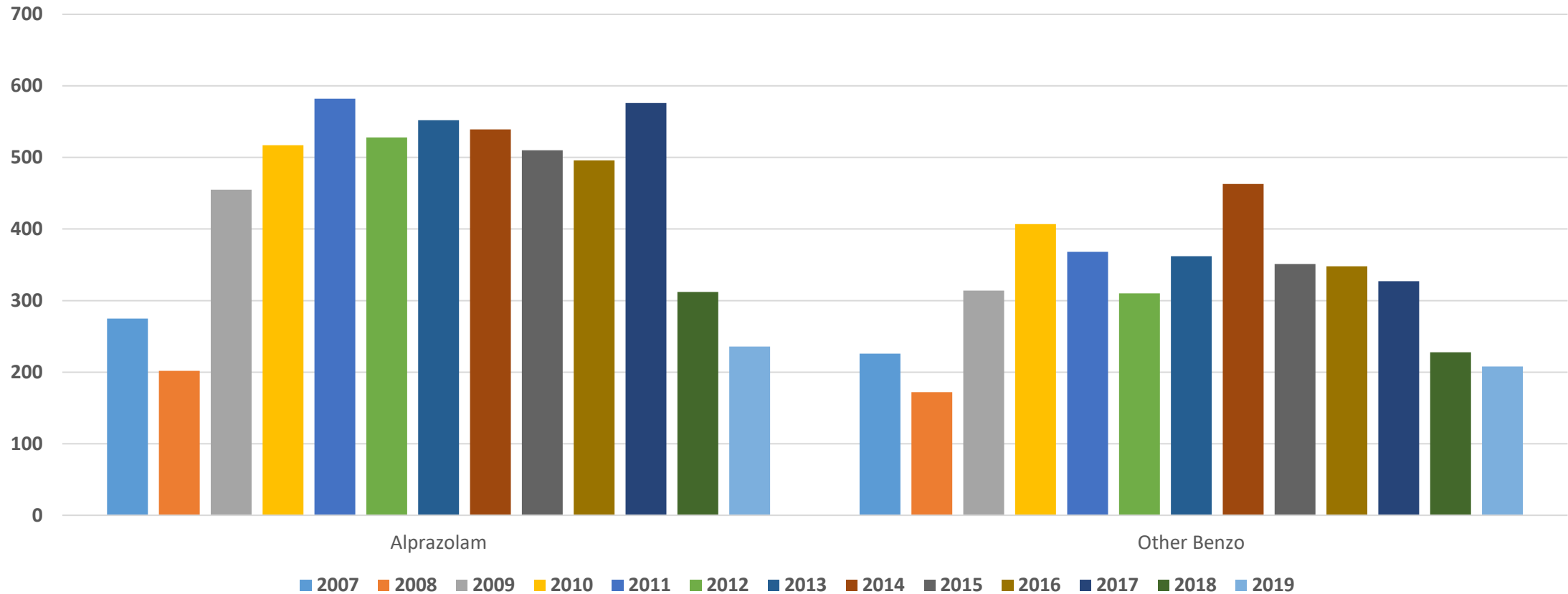
Number of Decedents Reporting Select Drugs on Board at Death (2007-2019)



- The prevalence of stimulants on board among Georgia decedents remains high. The decrease from 2018 to 2019 was found in all three stimulant types.
- Local DEA and HIDTA officials describe the supply of cocaine in Atlanta to be more stable than any other major drug. Neither crack/cocaine prices nor purity rates have fluctuated significantly in the last 5 years.

Source: Georgia Medical Examiner's Office

Benzodiazepines on Board at Time of Death (2007-2019)



- All major drug indicators suggest a decrease in benzodiazepine use in metro Atlanta, compared to the previous 5-6 years.
- According to ethnographic reports, benzodiazepines continue to be the one drug most often abused by females and there has been increased use among persons < 26.
- Xanax and all-other benzodiazepines on board among Georgia decedents are at the lowest point since 2008.

Treatment Tables

Treatment data were not available for this SCS at the time this report was published.

Sources

DATA FOR THIS REPORT WERE DRAWN FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Law enforcement reports of local drug use trends, prices, and availability were obtained from officials at the Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). Annual meetings with HIDTA staff are supplemented with multiple telephone consultations throughout the year.

State drug-related mortality data were obtained from the Georgia Medical Examiner's Office. Data represent the number of postmortem specimens that tested positive for a particular drug and were collected from fiscal years 2007 through 2019.

Poison exposure call data were extracted using general terms from the Georgia Poison Control Center and represent the count of drug exposure calls by drug from 2012 to 2019.

For additional information about the drugs and drug use patterns discussed in this report, please contact Brian J. Dew, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Counseling and Psychological Services, Georgia State University, P.O. Box 3980, Atlanta, GA 30302, Phone: 404-413-8168, E-mail: bdew@gsu.edu.