



Background Briefing:

Policy Solutions to the Commonwealth's Fentanyl Crisis

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Briefing Purpose

- Define major study questions and research methods
- Describe fentanyl's impact in Virginia
- Discuss priorities for policy option development phase

*Final report with policy options presented during
September 2025 JCHC Full Commission Meeting*

Agenda

Study questions and methods

Information on illicit fentanyl use in Virginia

Virginia's response to the fentanyl crisis

Next steps

Study purpose

Per House Joint Resolution No. 41 (2024):

- Study the causes of the rise in fentanyl prevalence and fentanyl overdoses
- Study the impact of the rise in fentanyl prevalence and fentanyl overdoses on Virginians and the health care system
- Study and provide insight into the fentanyl crisis within the context of other drug crises and addiction trends in recent history
- Establish and make policy recommendations to reduce the prevalence of fentanyl and reduce the number of fentanyl overdoses in the Commonwealth

Study approved by Commission for the 2025 workplan on December 17, 2024.

Major study questions

- What are the trends in fentanyl use, misuse, overdoses, and deaths in Virginia?
- To what extent are prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies implemented in Virginia having an impact?
- What gaps or unmet needs still exist?

Research Methods

- Data analysis: to analyze trends in fentanyl overdoses and overdose deaths
- Literature review: to summarize evidence-based prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies
- Document review: to identify strategies and document their impact in Virginia
- Interviews: to obtain perspective from agencies, communities, and individuals impacted

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Illicit fentanyl is highly addictive, readily available, and deadly

- Pharmaceutical fentanyl effectively treats severe pain before or after surgery and during advanced-stage cancer
- Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is made in clandestine labs and distributed through illegal drug markets
 - Highly potent, cheaply made and easy to transport
 - Illicit drugs laced with fentanyl cost less to produce and are more affordable for drug users
 - Potency varies during manufacturing and cannot be readily determined by users

Fentanyl misuse and illicit use occurs in multiple ways

Misuse of prescribed fentanyl

- Frequently changing or chewing patches
- Extracting fentanyl from patches to inject

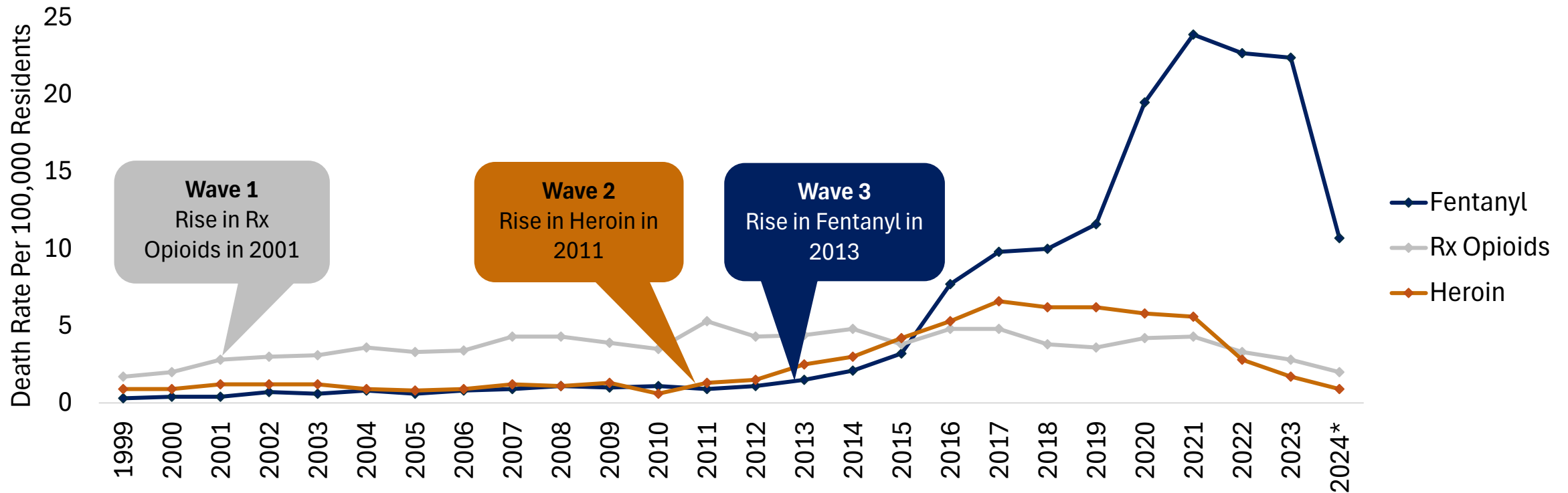
Unintentional use of illicit fentanyl

- Fentanyl-laced pills typically obtained online
- Fentanyl-laced illicit drugs such as heroin or cocaine

Intentional use of illicit fentanyl

- Mental and physical dependence
- Opioid use disorder

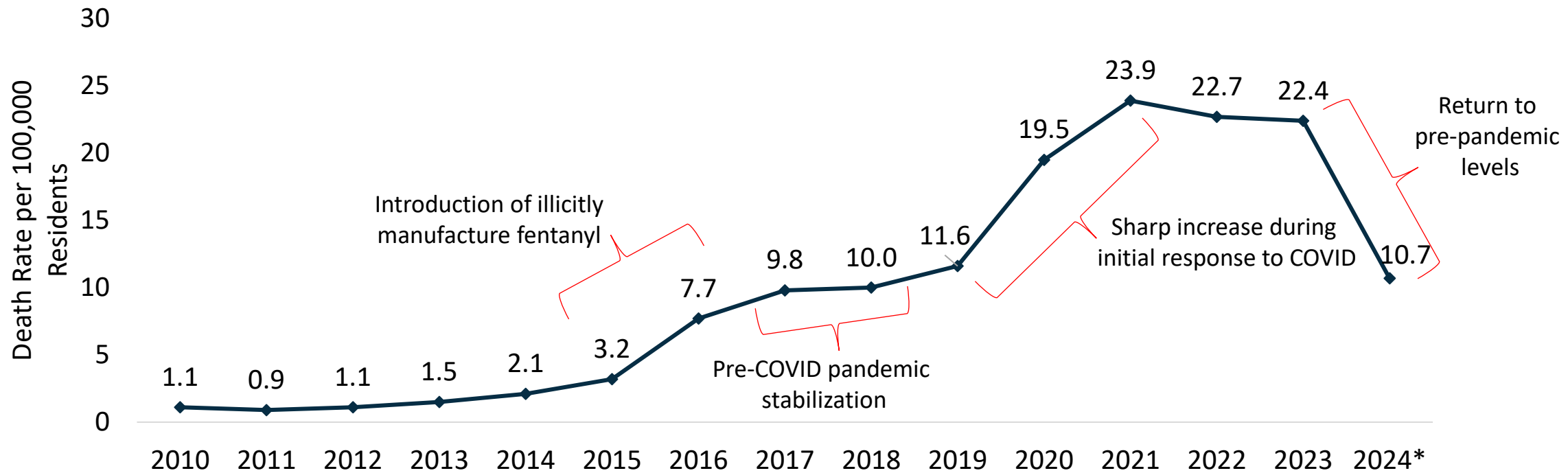
Fentanyl represents the third wave of opioid overdose deaths in Virginia



*2024 data are not final until November 2025 and subject to change.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics System, Mortality 1999-2020 and 2018-2023 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released in 2024. Data are from the Multiple Cause of Death Files, 1999-2020 and 2018-2023, as compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program.

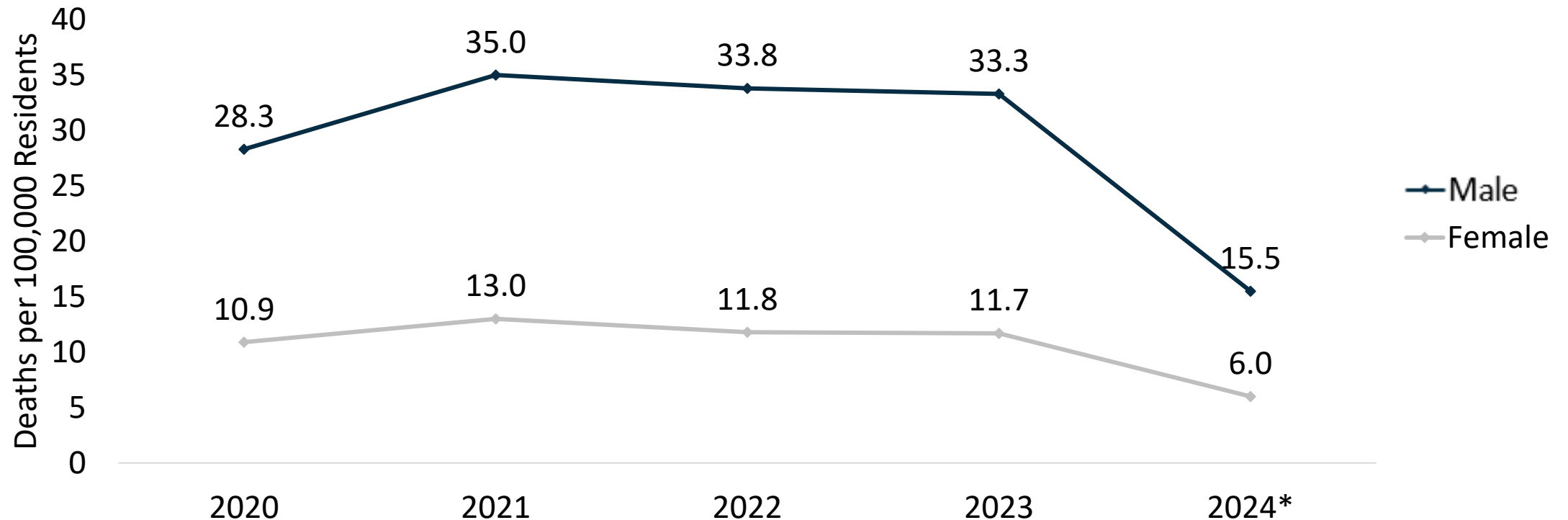
Fentanyl overdose deaths have changed significantly since 2010



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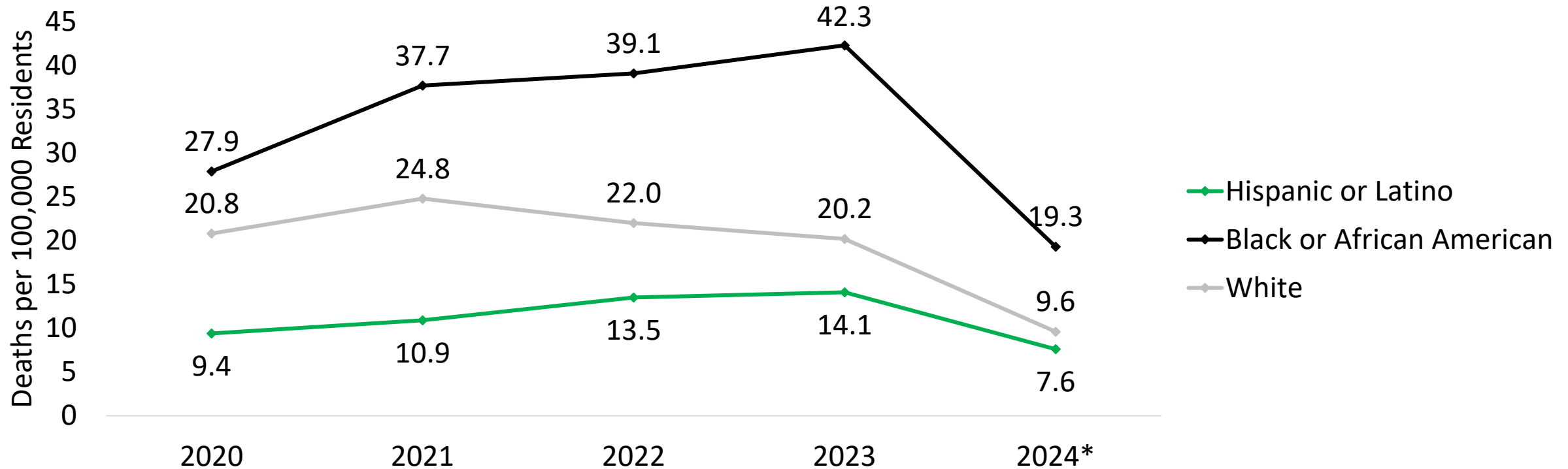
Males are more likely to experience a fatal overdose



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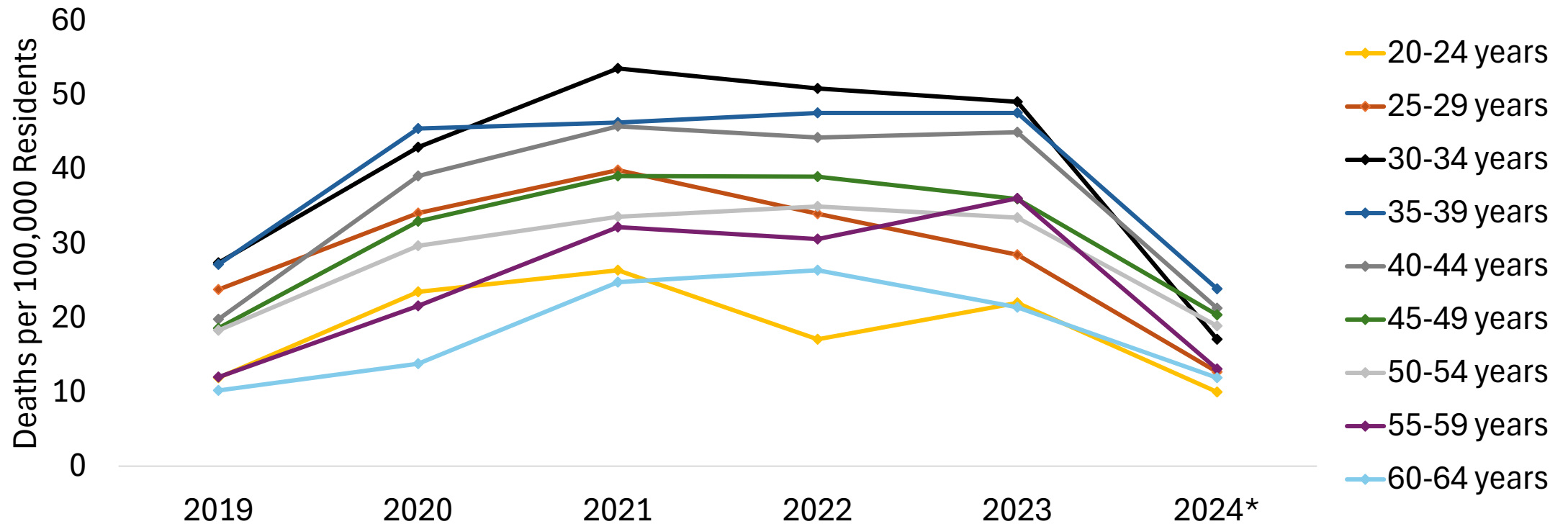
Black individuals experience higher rates of overdose death rates



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SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics System, Mortality 1999-2020 and 2018-2023 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released in 2024. Data are from the Multiple Cause of Death Files, 1999-2020 and 2018-2023, as compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program.

Individuals aged 30 to 55 experience higher rates of overdose death



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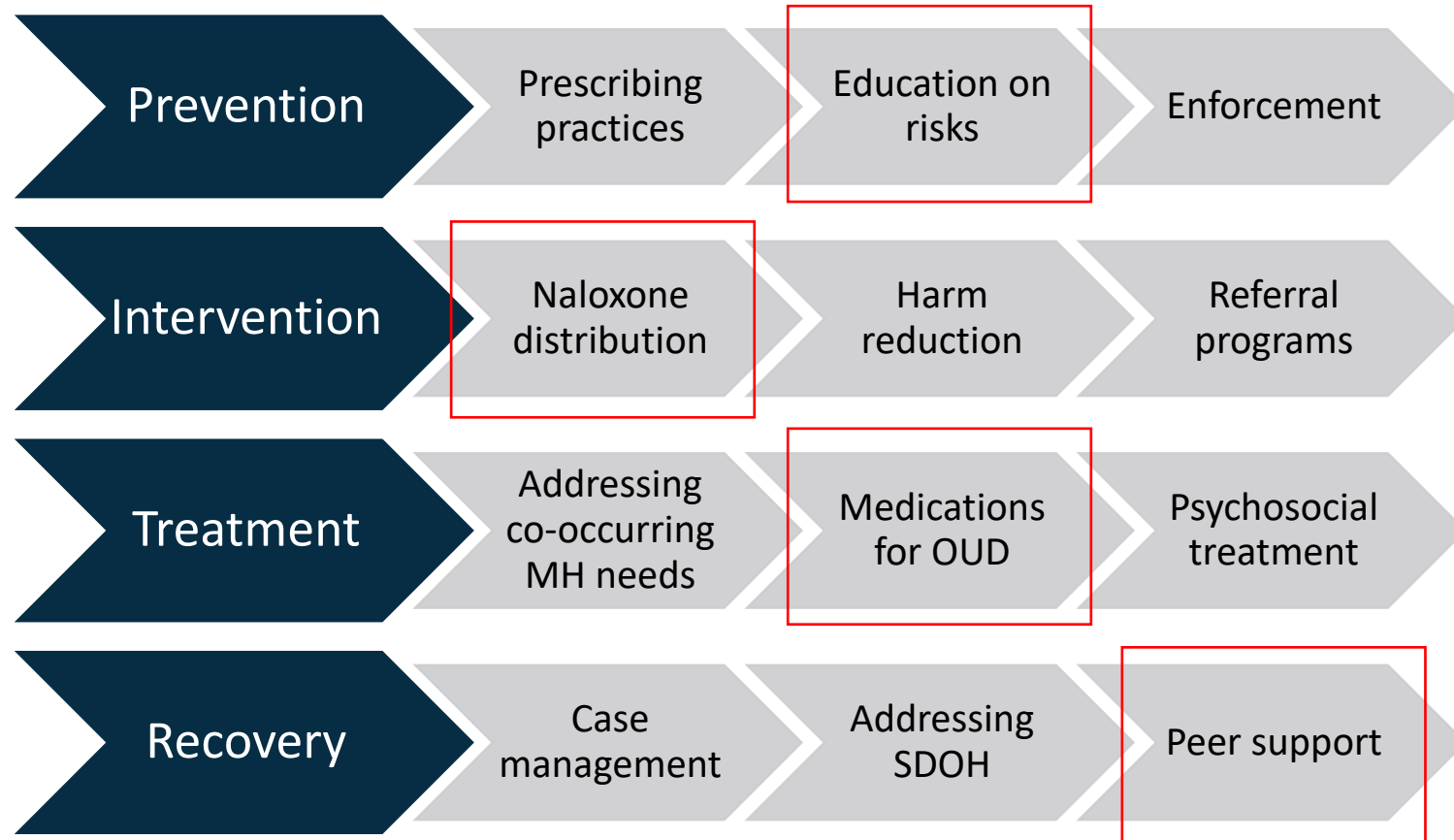
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Multiple factors contribute to the rise in fentanyl overdose deaths

- Impacts of COVID-19:
 - Job loss, social isolation, anxiety and stress
 - Disruptions in supply chain and costs of illicit drugs
- Education on the risks of fentanyl and harm reduction strategies were limited at the onset

Effective strategies exist to reduce fentanyl overdose deaths



MH = mental health; OUD = opioid use disorder; SDOH = social determinants of health

Virginia is implementing evidence-based strategies to address fentanyl

- Staff identified 53 strategy types across multiple entities:
 - Secretary of Administration
 - Secretary of Education
 - Secretary of Health and Human Resources
 - Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security
 - Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs
 - Opioid Abatement Authority
 - Office of the Attorney General

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Strategy review will inform focus for policy option development

- Virginia is pivoting from an emergent response to sustainment of effort:
 - What is working, and for whom?
 - What challenges or gaps remain?
 - How are efforts being coordinated?
 - How are resources being distributed?

Final report with policy options presented during September 2025 JCHC Full Commission Meeting

Questions/Discussion

Opportunity for public comment

- Submit written public comments by close of business on Friday, May 30th

Email: jchcpubliccomments@jchc.virginia.gov

Mail: 411 E. Franklin Street, Suite 505
Richmond, VA 23219

NOTE: All public comments are subject to FOIA and must be released upon request.