

Kentucky overdose deaths declined in 2025 in four-year downward trend

Sarah Ladd
Kentucky Lantern

Help is available to Kentuckians living with addiction. For resources, visit <https://findhelpnow.org/ky>. In physical emergencies, call 911. For mental health crises, call or text 988. Locate free Naloxone (Narcan), which can reverse overdoses, near you here.

For the fourth year in a row, the number of Kentuckians who died from drug overdoses declined in 2025, according to the annual overdose report that was released Thursday.

The 2025 Drug Overdose Fatality Report shows overdose deaths are down nearly 23% from 2024.

Gov. Andy Beshear credited grants from the Office of Drug Control Policy, the nearly 183,000 doses of Narcan distributed in the state last year and other efforts in a state among the worst-hit by the opioid crisis.

Still, 1,110 Kentuckians died last year from overdoses. That's down from 1,439 in 2024, 2,020 in 2023 and 2,200 in 2022.

"In honor of those lost to addiction, we must keep working every day for the inches to become the miles of progress, because that's how we save more Kentuckians from addiction and help protect more families from the heartbreak and pain that comes with this disease," Beshear said.

Takeaways from the report

The 34-page report shows methamphetamine and fentanyl were the top culprits in last year's overdose deaths, present in 50% and 45% of all deaths, respectively. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is similar to morphine but is 50 to 100 times more potent. Methamphetamine is a synthetic stimulant that is highly addictive.

Other findings in the latest report include:

Fentanyl was identified in 504 drug overdose deaths, which was a nearly 43% decrease from the 883 drug overdose deaths involving fentanyl in 2024.

Methamphetamine also declined, identified in 549 drug overdose deaths, which was a decrease of nearly 24% from the overdose deaths involving methamphetamine in 2024.

In addition to methamphetamine and fentanyl, toxicology results showed the presence of cocaine, acetylfentanyl, oxycodone, heroin and alprazolam in deaths.

In 2025, most people who died from drug overdoses were between the ages of 45-54, followed by those 35-44 and 55-64. Fewer than five children five years old and younger died.

Jefferson County had the highest rate of fentanyl-related deaths, followed by Fayette and Kenton Counties.

Jefferson County had the highest rate of methamphetamine-related deaths, followed by Fayette and Madison Counties.

Speaking at Beshear's weekly press conference, Office of Drug Control Policy Executive Director Van Ingram said getting the deaths down has "been a long fight" and "there were days that it just seemed impossible."

"For the fourth year in a row, to see these numbers come down, I can't tell you what it means to folks out of the field all across this state, that toil every day, working with people in addiction, doing everything they can to help them get in recovery and stay in recovery," Ingram said.

Beshear asked people to seek help at <https://findhelpnow.org/ky>.

"We want to provide the resources to help you through it. There is no stigma," he said. "Asking for help is one of the bravest things that anyone can do. And if you have a family member that you're worried about suffering through addiction, please reach out, encourage them to get help. We want to get to a point where we end this epidemic in our lifetime and not leave it to our kids and to our grandkids."

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Looking back to May 4, 2018

Written by Christy Hoots

The following information was entered into the May 4, 2018, edition of The Ledger Independent:

Legislators give session update

State Rep. John Sims and State Sen. Steve West were in Maysville Thursday to give an update on the recent legislative session in Frankfort.

The event was sponsored by the Maysville-Mason County Area Chamber of Commerce.

West spoke on the three major pieces of legislation passed during the session, including House Bill 200, which was the budget bill; Senate Bill 151, which was the pension reform bill; and the tax reform bill.

"This session could be summed up in a few adjectives — it was difficult, painful, historic, productive," West said. "This is my fourth session. Some of the old timers there said this was the craziest, most pressure packed session they've seen. There were protests and a lot of speech from both parties. We eventually overrode vetoes from our governor in our own party."

Of the budget bill, West said. "I felt we did a really good job keeping everything whole," he said. "The main things we wanted to do was protect public protection, infrastructure and education."

West said in regards to K-12 public education, legislators were able to pass a budget that put more money into the Support Excellence in Education in Kentucky fund, return funding for Family Resource and Youth Service Center programs and restored funding for school transportation.

"We did a really good job protecting education," he said. "You might see something on social media about how 6.25 percent was cut from education, but that's not entirely true. We did cut from 6.25 percent but it was from the Frankfort component. You have several components. One of those is the Kentucky Department of Education component and the daily operations of that. That's what we mean when we say we cut the Frankfort component."

West also explained why the final pension reform bill was pushed through as Senate Bill 151, which was originally a waste water bill.

"After so far into the session,

new bills can no longer be filed," he said. "However, bills can be sent through as attachments, which is what happened in this situation. The only bill that was available was SB 151, so it was used a vehicle for the pension reform bill."

He walked through the evolution and passage of the bill which began with Gov. Matt Bevin submitting his proposal late last year. The bill then went through changes in the House and Senate and both sides made compromises.

"It's safe to say that the governor's proposal drew a lot of attention," West said. "It was dead on arrival at the House. Groups brought in shared responsibility plans and I've probably met with 35 groups of teachers from my area. We listened and we came up with a bill."

In the bill recently passed, current retirees benefits remain the same; for current teachers, the only change will be that they can not accumulate sick days to be used on their retirement benefits. However, they can receive payouts for the accumulated sick days. New teachers will be moved to a cash-hybrid plan.

"We knew if anything would pass, it would have to be from the House," he said.

West also talked about the tax reform bill.

"It's a tax increase," he said. "It will raise an extra \$400 million in revenue, which will be used for the pension system. It's a good first step."

The bill will add a 6 percent sales tax on services not previously tax, which includes small animal veterinarian services, landscaping, salons, maintenance work, car repair, extended warranties and several other services.

West said the tax reform bill also changes the individual income tax to a flat 5 percent.

"If you make over so much, that brings your income tax down to 5 percent," he said. "I've heard people say, 'yes, but you're not giving a tax break to the poor' and that's true, but there is a reason behind that. If you make less than \$18,000 a year, you pay no income tax."

According to West, the corporate tax was also lowered.

"This bill will make us more competitive on an individual income tax and for businesses," he said. "It will phase out the inventory

tax over four years, which will also help bring in more businesses. If a place like Amazon is looking for a state to bring in new business, they're going to look at the state with the tax and the one without and they're going to go to the state without the inventory tax."

Sims spoke briefly on a few bills that had passed during the session, which included SB 5 which would help smaller, locally owned pharmacies.

"This bill will level the playing field for small pharmacies to compete against the larger pharmacies," Sims said.

Sims also talked about how he believed the tax bill that was passed did not do what was needed to bring in more revenue.

"I put a bandage on a cut instead of stitching it," he said. "I don't think it did everything that it needed to do."

Other bills passed, according to Sims, included HB 132, which would require a financial literacy course in order to teach students how to be financially responsible and HB 400, which would allow the sale of Bourbon through mail order.

House Bill 1 was also briefly discussed by West and Sims.

"This bill makes several reforms to the adoption and foster care system in Kentucky," West said.

West and Sims said infrastructure will most likely be one of the hot topics during the next legislative session.

One person in the room asked about the medical marijuana bill and why it did not go to a vote during session.

West said failed for two reasons — federal law that still makes possession of medical marijuana illegal and the lack of select studies on the effectiveness of the medical marijuana.

"It's still illegal at the federal level," he said. "Some states, like Colorado, have a letter from the Department of Justice that says they will not enforce the law. However, if a new DOJ head comes in, he could overturn that letter and start arresting people. A lot of states don't want to put their people through that."

Sims, however, said he does believe the topic will be revisited and considered next year.

"I think it has a chance next year," Sims said.

Primary

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online retail to owning the vending machines you see at some local restaurants and stores.

He claims to have created the "no drill cheek rest" for guns.

"I'm the entrepreneur that created that product and then I own my own vending machine business," Riley said.

"I make a little money at it and it's fun," said Riley.

"Ever since the early 2000's I've been turning side hustles into full time jobs," said Riley. "I haven't hit a time card since 2003."

Riley has not held a public office in the past, but he did attempt a run for Brown County Com-

missioner around 10 years ago.

In 2016, Riley attempted a run for commissioner as an independent candidate, but failed to make the ballot for the primary.

Riley said he decided to make a run for the Brown County Board of Commissioner this year because of "the lies."

"The lies that started up around this data center out here (Mt. Orab), and then when I found out that the commissioners were under the same non-disclosure agreement that the village council members were under - I was like, 'okay.' It made me mad enough to get up off the couch," said Riley. "I was completely content with just being the man that wanted to be left alone. I wanted to make my gun videos, go fish-

ing, and make a little bit of money. And when I started seeing all of these lies and deceptions coming out in Mt. Orab, I got my investigative hat on and I started digging... same thing an investigative journalist would do. I just started digging, and every time I flipped over a rock I found something that was incredibly disturbing. So, you know, I decided that I'm not going to be the guy that just sits online and cries about it, I'm going to actually get involved and do something about it."

In recent months, Riley has spent a great deal of time attending, streaming and recording meetings of village councils throughout Brown County and board of commissioner meetings and sharing his videos and comments via social

media sources such as Facebook.

"I'm here and I'm ready to work for you," Riley said to the voters of Brown County. "I'm ready to be honest, I'm not going to lie to you, even if it hurts me in the process. That's what we need out of government officials. We need people that are going to be honest, stand behind what they say, and look out for the people's best interest."

Early in-person voting hours for the May 5 Primary Election are as follows:

- Wednesday, April 29, 2026 – Friday, May 1, 2026 7:30 am to 7:30 pm
- Saturday, May 2, 2026 8:00 am to 4:00 pm
- Sunday, May 3, 2026 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm

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