

# Reducing Overdose Disparities through Equitable Distribution of Funding & Resources

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Overdose deaths for Black Marylanders increased by about 74 percent between 2017-2021, while decreasing by 5 percent for White Marylanders.<sup>1</sup> To address these disparities, Maryland's Racial Disparities in Overdose Taskforce was convened in 2021, and identified policy and programmatic recommendations that could be implemented to immediately reduce deaths among Black Marylanders. This policy project operationalized a recommendation from the taskforce by partnering with the Maryland Office on Overdose Response (MOOR) (formerly Opioid Operational Command Center.)<sup>2</sup> to assess and reform how state general funds were distributed to focus on reducing overdose deaths among Black Marylanders.**

**" Maryland's Office of Overdose Response now requires applicants for our grants programs to include equity impact statements in their proposals because working towards health equity is an essential part of creating a Maryland that leaves no one behind. This is all the more crucial considering racial disparities in overdose outcomes have increased in Maryland and across the country in recent years. All communities deserve access to world-class substance use care."**

— Emily Keller, Special Secretary of Overdose Response,  
Maryland Office of Overdose Response

## CONTEXT OR SCOPE OF PROBLEM:

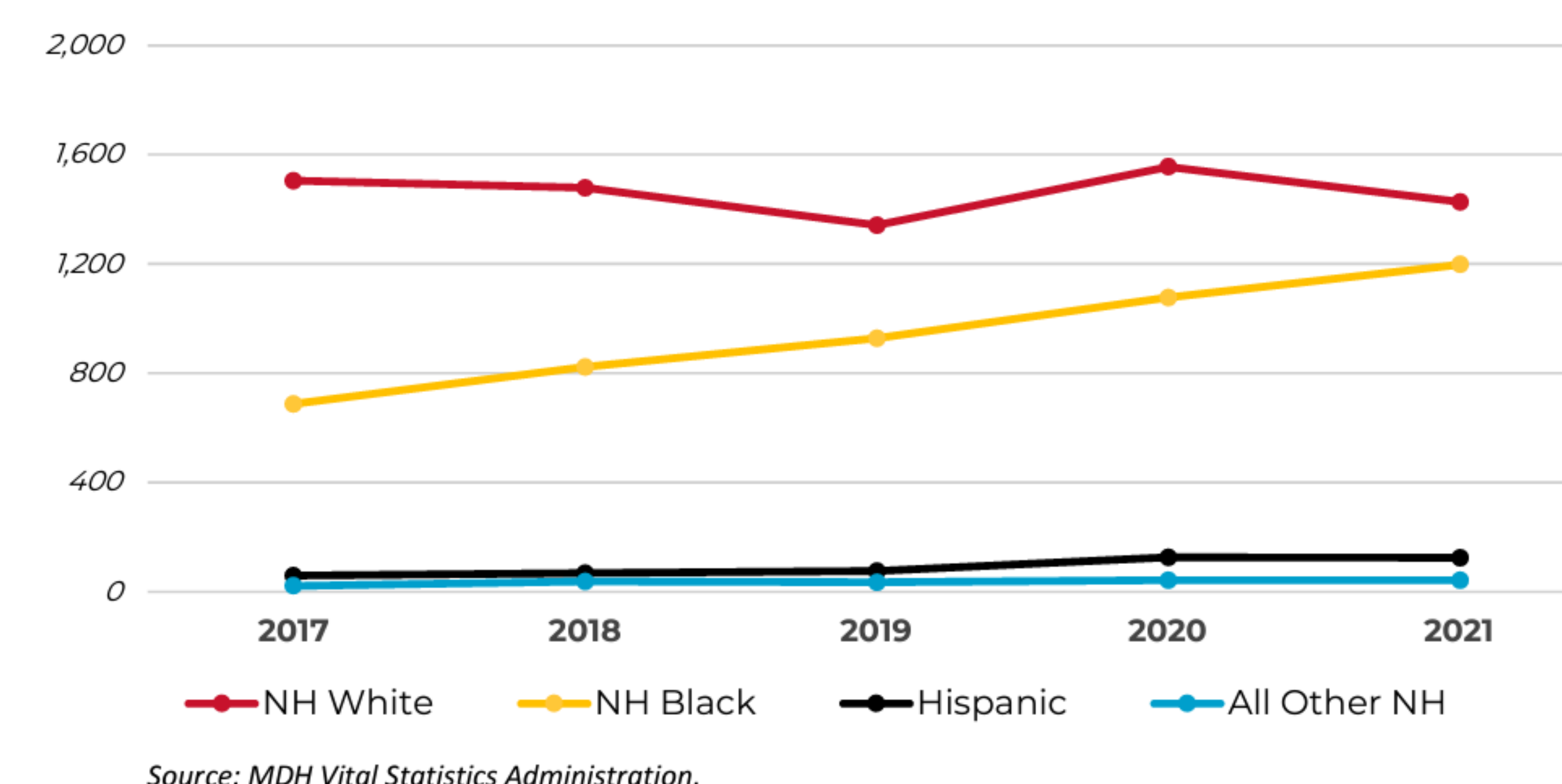
Maryland, like many parts of the country, have experienced growing disparities in overdose deaths by race and ethnicity. Data also indicates that there are disparities in buprenorphine dispensing by race and ethnicity<sup>4</sup> and barriers in access to harm reduction services.<sup>5</sup> To eliminate overdose death disparities, states need to invest in communities that have been disproportionately impacted.

To address growing disparities, the Racial Disparities in Overdose Taskforce was launched in 2021, under the Interagency Opioid Coordinating Council, chaired by former Maryland Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford. The taskforce was chaired by former Deputy Secretary for Behavioral Health, Dr. Aliya Jones and met for 18 months between February 2021 and September 2022. The taskforce identified a variety of policies and programs that could be implemented immediately to reduce overdose death.

This project focused on operationalizing a specific recommendation of the task force, which is centered around improving transparency in state expenditures related to the overdose crisis, including the recommendation for the State of Maryland to implement impact statements for organizations applying for state government grants. These impact statements require applicants to outline populations at greatest risk for overdose and identify how a particular program will target populations disproportionately impacted.

To ensure that states are awarding funding to programs and initiatives that will have the greatest impact in reducing overdose death, states need to better understand who programs are serving. By understanding the target population of programs and aligning it with demographic data on individuals who are at greatest risk of overdose in a particular area, states can improve programmatic impact. By connecting disproportionately impacted populations to services and resources, opioid-related morbidity and mortality rates will improve.

Figure 1. Overdose Death by Race/Ethnicity (2017-2021)<sup>3</sup>



## POLICY ALTERNATIVES:

Prior to implementing the impact statements, the Maryland Office of Overdose Response (MOOR) did not ask applicants to review demographic data of overdose decedents and identify how programming will address their populations at greatest risk of overdose.

**Policy Implementation and Outcomes:** This section contains the most detailed explanation of the concrete steps that the State took to address the policy issue.

In 2017, Governor Larry Hogan established the Opioid Operational Command Center to serve as the state's principle coordinating office for the overdose crisis. The office was renamed the Maryland Office of Overdose Response in 2023 by Governor Wes Moore.<sup>6</sup>

The MOOR was identified as the optimal office for implementing impact statements for a few reasons. The office administers \$10 million annually in general funds to all 24 jurisdictions in Maryland, including to community-based organizations that are attuned to the needs of the populations they serve. Given that the office administers general funds, there is more flexibility with what programs can be funded. Partnering with the MOOR was also selected because at the time of the initiation of the project, this office was tasked with administering opioid restitution funding, in addition to state general funds.



To incorporate impact statements, the following steps were taken:

- Review of the Racial Disparities in Overdose Task Force report.
- Development of a proposal for how the MOOR could implement impact statements into their competitive grant applications.
- Meetings with former Deputy Secretary for Behavioral Health at the Maryland Department of Health, and chair of the Racial Disparities in Overdose Taskforce, to discuss the recommendations and potential impact.
- Pitch of the concept to MOOR leadership, including Special Secretary for Overdose Response, Grants Administrator and Deputy Director/Chief of Staff.
- Upon buy-in into the concept, the office partnered with the Behavioral Health Administration to develop demographic profiles by counties to provide to the grantees when completing competitive grant applications.
- Impact statements were incorporated into MOOR competitive grant applications in Spring 2023.
- Applicants who did not include impact statements were not considered for funding.

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## References

1. [https://anth.umd.edu/sites/anth.umd.edu/files/pubs/ajph.2022.306767\\_published.pdf](https://anth.umd.edu/sites/anth.umd.edu/files/pubs/ajph.2022.306767_published.pdf)
  2. In 2017, Governor Larry Hogan established the Opioid Operational Command Center to serve as the state's principle coordinating office for the overdose crisis. The office was renamed the Maryland Office of Overdose Response in 2023 by Governor Wes Moore.
  3. <https://stopoverdose.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2023/08/8-15-2023-2022-DORM-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>
  4. <https://stopoverdose.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2023/04/Racial-Disparities-in-Overdose-Task-Force-Policy-and-Programmatic-Recommendations.pdf>
  5. [https://anth.umd.edu/sites/anth.umd.edu/files/pubs/ajph.2022.306767\\_published.pdf](https://anth.umd.edu/sites/anth.umd.edu/files/pubs/ajph.2022.306767_published.pdf)
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