

Mental Health in the COVID-19 Era

Oklahoma suicide, overdose, and behavioral health trends

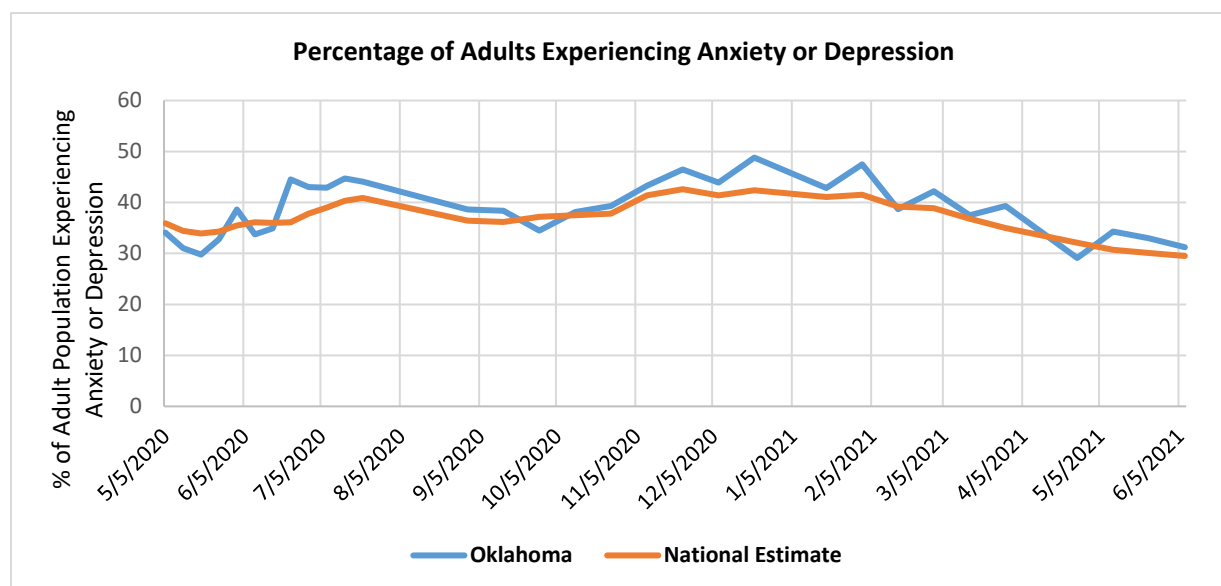
The impacts of this pandemic are far-reaching and unprecedented. As a result of the stress and anxiety of the COVID-19 era, Oklahomans are experiencing increased mental health need. This update discusses the pandemic's impact on deaths related to behavioral health; its impact on prevalence of anxiety, depression and substance use conditions; the changes in utilization of behavioral services and the frequency of people needing but not receiving behavioral health treatment.

Key takeaways

- **Both anxiety and depression increased dramatically**, with Oklahoma rates during some periods of the pandemic reaching nearly four times higher than in 2019.
- Suicide increased between 8% to 10% statewide in 2020, and **rural areas had a 27% increase**.
- **Overdoses rates are back to 2017 levels and rising**, erasing over two years of improvement. Substance use by those under age 25 are among the drivers.
- Telehealth has become the top method for accessing mental health services, but workforce challenges will continue to be a barrier. Around **50% of telehealth encounters** in Oklahoma are related to mental health and substance use disorders.

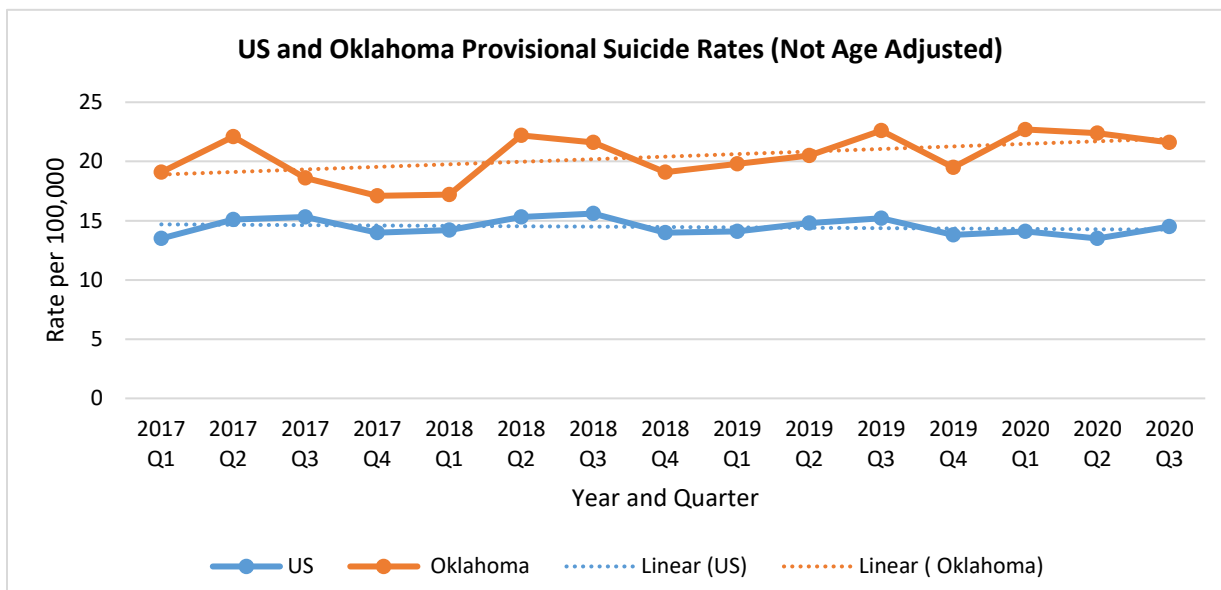
Anxiety and depression trends

Oklahoma's baseline rate for any mental illness was around 20% pre-pandemic, but COVID-era stressors led to a peak of nearly 49% in late 2020 for depression and anxiety symptoms.



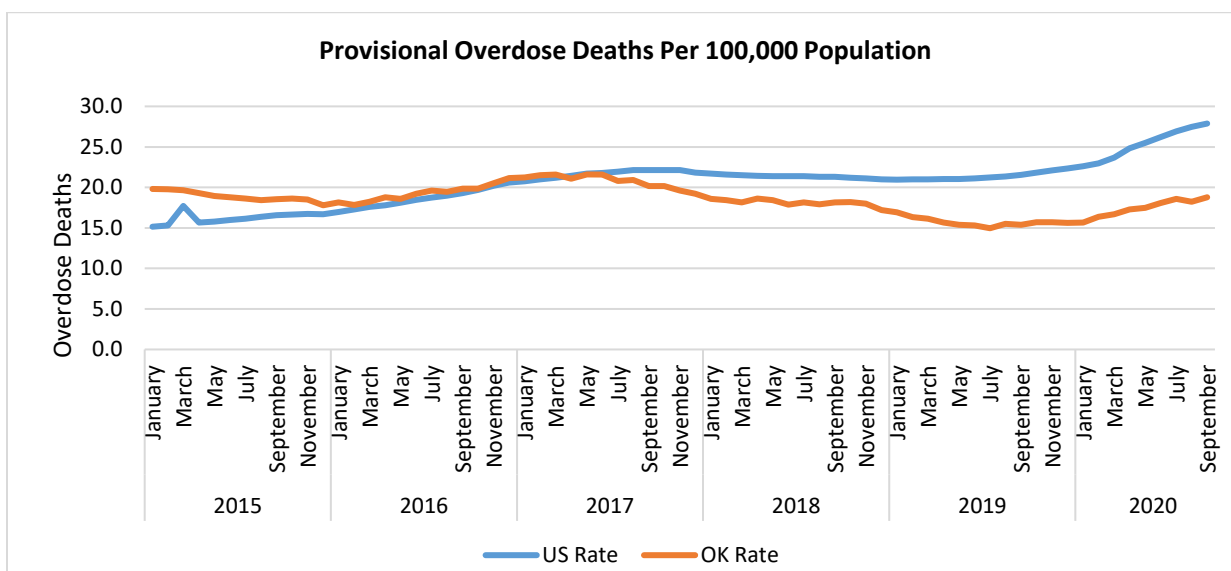
Suicide and suicide ideation

Amid increasing depression and anxiety, Oklahoma’s suicide rate has increased to its highest level in recent years. **Rural suicides have increased by 27% during the pandemic, compared to 8%-10% statewide.**



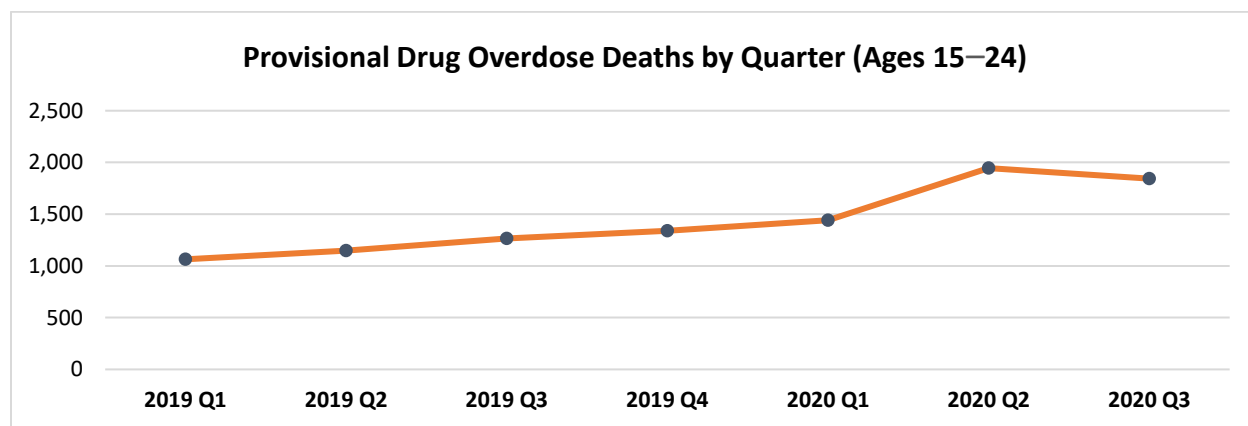
Substance use and overdose

National research indicates COVID-era stressors contributed to increasing substance use, and available state data strongly implies a similar conclusion. Synthetic opioids (like fentanyl), alcohol and youth substance use are among the drivers. At its peak in April, the percentage of substance use disorder and overdose claims data was about **120% higher** than in 2019.

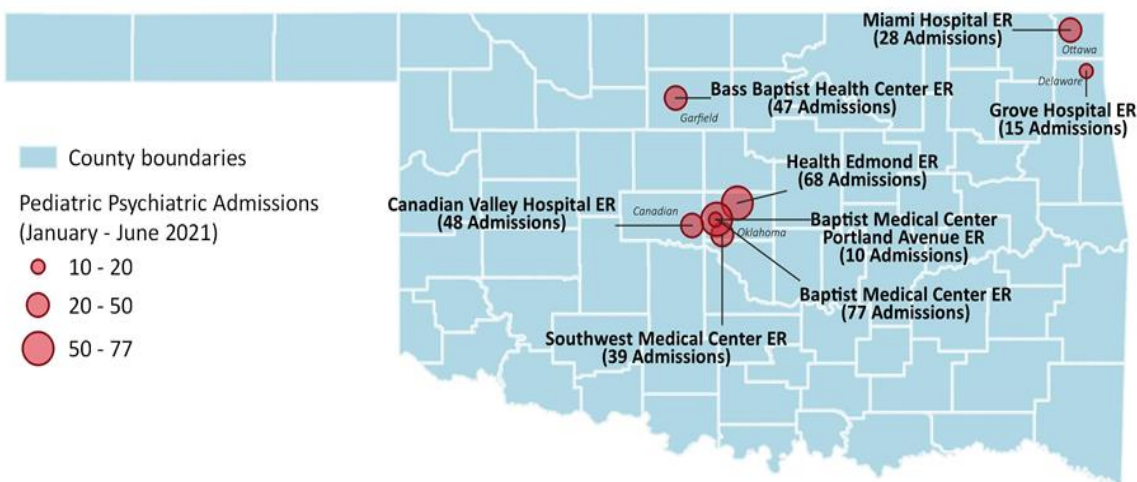


Children and youth impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of children and youth, exposing them to prolonged stress and social isolation that have the potential to negatively **affect their mental health**. Youth **suicidality and substance use** have increased as a result.



INSIGHT: System and geographic gaps in children’s crisis care translates to higher children’s mental health needs at hospital emergency rooms.



*Case study: INTEGRIS reports a 117% increase in inpatient pediatric (age 6-17) admissions resulting from **suicide-related visits** to the emergency department in the first five months of 2021.*