

April 2021

## Deaths Involving Cannabinoids in Broward County, 2019

The 2019 annual report by the Florida Medical Examiners Commission documents drugs identified in deceased persons. Specifically, they distinguish whether the drug(s) identified were either the cause or merely present at the time of death. Note that it is not uncommon for a decedent to have multiple drugs listed as a cause of death. However, if a drug did not play a causal role, these deaths are classified as drug occurrences and not deaths. This report is focused on deaths involving cannabinoids, the chemicals found in marijuana.

As shown in chart 1, cannabinoids were present in 41 deaths. Cannabinoids were also the cause of death in 18 cases. In these cases, the cannabinoid, along with other drugs, caused death, indicating that the death was associated with polysubstance use. Polysubstance use, or the consumption of multiple substances at the same

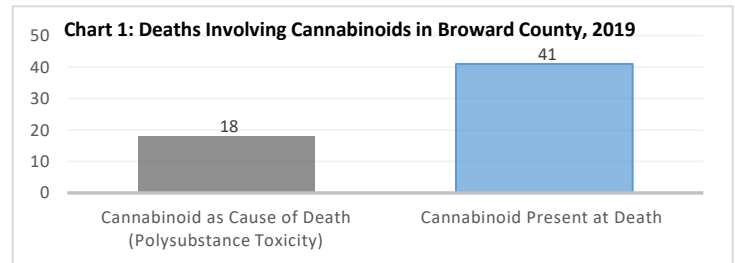
time, is common among substance users. Chart 2 breaks down the specific drugs causing these deaths.

Cannabinoids in combination with an opioid (i.e., fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, heroin, prescription opioids) caused the most deaths; cannabinoid deaths in conjunction with a stimulant and those in combination with an opioid and a stimulant were the second most common causes of death. It should be noted that reports of cocaine laced with fentanyl continue to emerge, and it is likely that combination use of these substances, especially among the opioid naive, can be especially dangerous. Benzodiazepines in conjunction with cannabinoids, opioids, and stimulants were also the cause of death in 3 cases. Concomitant use of benzodiazepines with opioids or other substances are also known to be deadly.

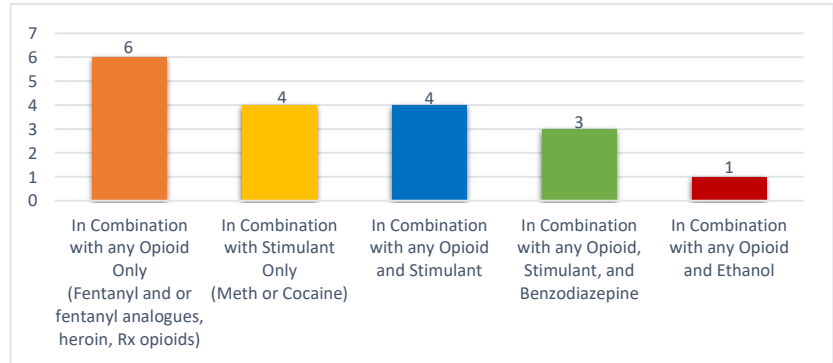
Data from this report highlight the continued trend of increasing polysubstance related deaths. Given this and the fact that polysubstance use has been found to result in more serious negative health consequences (i.e., mental distress, deficits in cognitive function, elevated risk for unsafe sex and infectious disease, and poor drug treatment outcomes <sup>1</sup>), specialized prevention and intervention efforts are warranted.

Sources: Florida Medical Examiners Commission 2019 Data; <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MEC/MEC-Home.aspx>; [https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA\\_Digital\\_Download/PEP20-05-02-002\\_0.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/PEP20-05-02-002_0.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Elliott L, Haddock CK, Campos S, Benoit E. Polysubstance use patterns and novel synthetics: A cluster analysis from three U.S. cities. *PLoS One* 2019;14(12):e0225273



**Chart 2: Cannabinoid as Cause of Death (Polysubstance Toxicity) in Broward County, 2019**



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