

Vermont Social Autopsy Report: Identifying Patterns in 2024 Overdose Deaths

Part Four: Criminal Justice

September 2026

This brief is the fourth in the Social Autopsy series and explores how Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 interacted with the criminal justice system in the year before they died. See [Vermont's Response to Overdose](#) for more information about this year's Social Autopsy Report.

In 2024, **213** Vermont residents died of an overdose in Vermont. While the work is data-driven, we must not lose sight of the fact that each data point represents a Vermonter who lost their life. The Vermont Department of Health, along with our partners, analyze these data in the context of this humanity.

The Department of Health partnered with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to learn how Vermonters who died of an overdose interacted with law enforcement agencies in Vermont before they died. Additionally, the Health Department partnered with the Department of Corrections (DOC) to determine whether people who died of an overdose had been incarcerated in Vermont in the year before they died, and if so, whether they had participated in a substance use screening or treatment during their incarceration.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact Vermont's Overdose Data to Action team at AHS.VDHod2a@vermont.gov.



Recent Interactions with Law Enforcement

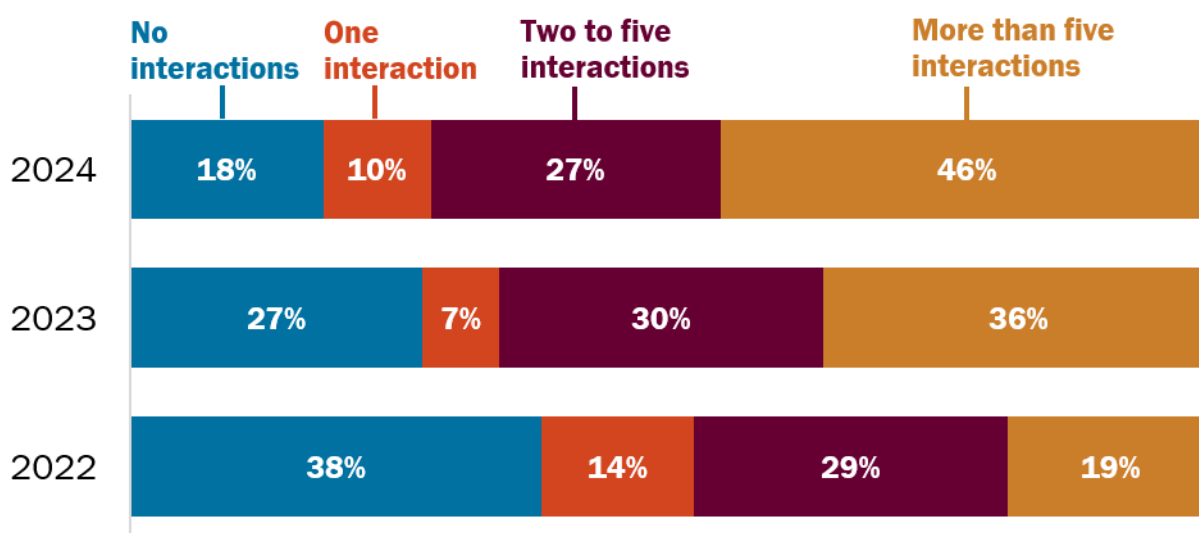
The Health Department reviewed records of law enforcement encounters that each Vermonter that died of an overdose in 2024 had in the year before their death. The records were collected from Vermont's law enforcement records management system, Valcour. This system contains information from all Vermont state, local, and county law enforcement agencies except the Hartford Police Department, Norwich Police Department, and Windsor Police Department. Due to the timeframe of this report, it contains partial information from the Royalton Police Department. An **interaction** is defined as any documented instance in which a person came into contact with State or local police and includes when a person calls the police, or is a witness, victim, person of interest, or offender. Encounters where the person was found deceased are excluded.

How often did people interact with law enforcement in the year before they died of an overdose?

Eighty-two percent of Vermonters who died of an overdose in 2024 interacted with law enforcement in some way within one year before their death. Nearly three-quarters (72%) interacted with law enforcement more than once, and nearly half (46%) had more than five interactions.

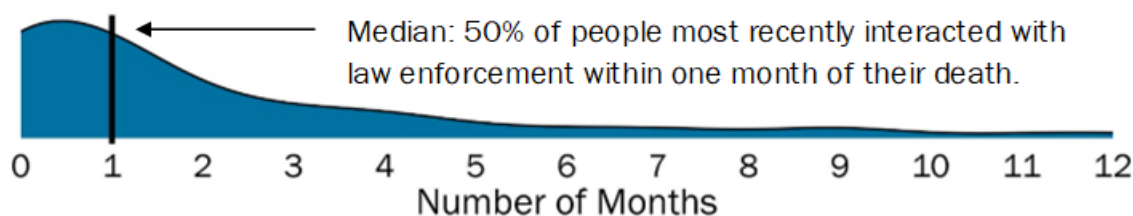
People who died of an overdose in 2024 interacted with law enforcement more often than people who died in previous years. Among the people who had any interaction with law enforcement in the year before their death, the median number of interactions was seven for those who died in 2024, compared to three in 2022 and five in 2023.

Nearly half of people who died of an overdose in 2024 interacted with law enforcement **more than five times** in the year before their death.



Of the people who died of an overdose in 2024 and interacted with law enforcement at least once in the year before their death, there was a median of one month between the date of the most recent interaction and date of death.

The median time between the most recent interaction with law enforcement and the date of death was one month.

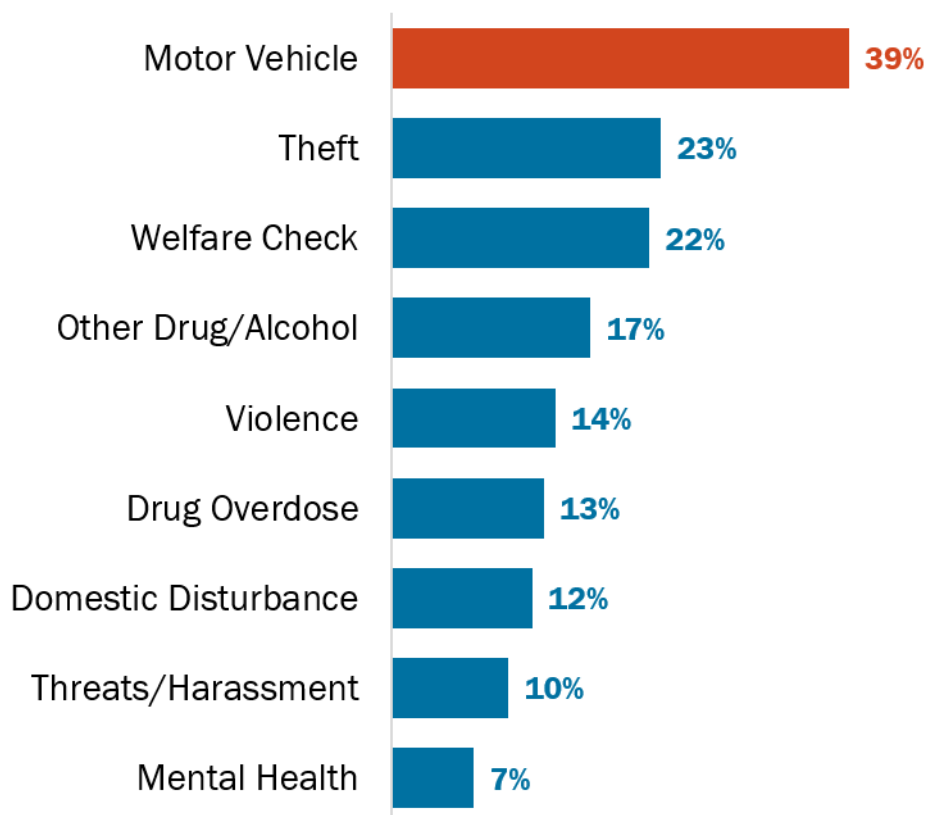


Interaction Type

For this analysis, each person's five most recent interactions with law enforcement were categorized by type. People who interacted with law enforcement more than five times in the year before their death may have had interactions within these categories that are not included in this analysis. Therefore, percentages may be an underestimate of all interactions that occurred in that category in the year before their death. Interactions were categorized regardless of the person's role (complainant, victim, person of interest, offender, etc.) in the incident. People may have also interacted with law enforcement for other reasons that are not categorized here.

Motor vehicle-related interactions were the most common type of interaction (39%), followed by theft (23%). About one in eight people who died of an overdose in 2024 had recently interacted with law enforcement because of a drug overdose (either their own past non-fatal overdose or somebody else's overdose) and one in six people for other reasons related to drugs or alcohol.

Among Vermonters who died of an overdose and had at least one interaction with law enforcement in the year before their death, **four in ten had a motor vehicle-related reason as one of their most recent interactions.**

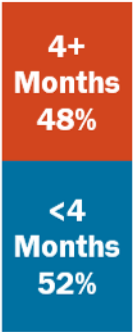


Incarceration History

General Incarceration History

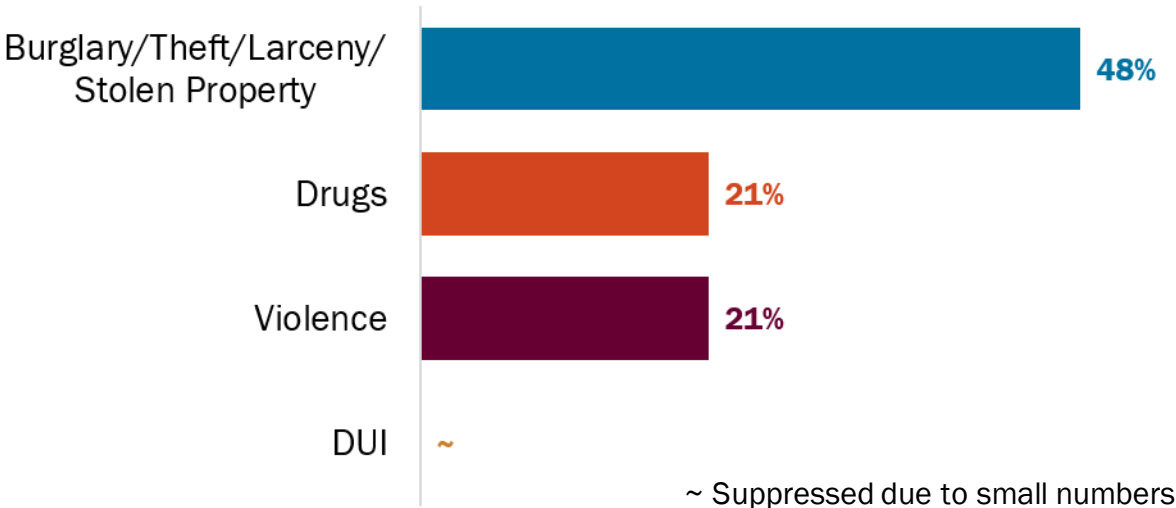
Of the 213 people who died of an overdose in 2024, 14% (29) were incarcerated in the year before their death. This is statistically similar to previous years (13% in 2022 and 17% in 2023).

- Three-quarters (76%) of the people incarcerated were white males.
- The mean age of this population was 43 years.
- Slightly less than half (45%) of the people incarcerated in the year before they died had been sentenced, while the remaining 55% were being detained.
- The median length of the most recent incarceration was **five days**. For people who were detained, the median was two days and for those who were sentenced, 114 days.
- Of those incarcerated within a year of their death, 52% died less than four months after their release.
- About one in five people were charged with a drug-related crime, and one in five were charged with a violent crime. Nearly half (48%) were charged with theft, burglary, larceny, or stolen property crimes. Fewer than six people were charged with DUI.



Among those incarcerated in the year before their overdose death, just over half died **less than four months after release.**

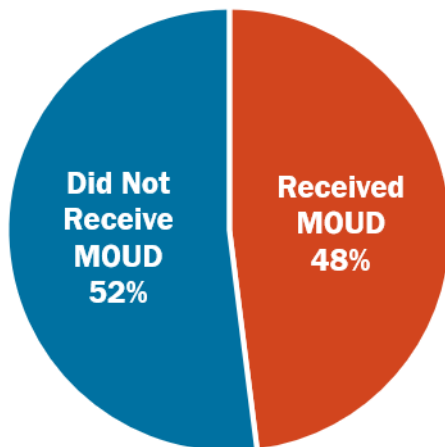
One in five people incarcerated in the year before they died were charged with **drug-related crimes.**



Substance Use Screening and Treatment

In July 2018, [Act 176](#) went into effect, which directed the DOC to continue all forms of federally approved and verified prescription medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD), as well as start people on buprenorphine when it was medically necessary and the person chose to begin treatment. This became the standard of care for people in a correctional facility beginning in 2020. The analyses in this brief cannot fully describe the DOC's current treatment practices for those with substance use disorder within Vermont correctional facilities.

About half of people who were incarcerated in the year before they died **received MOUD while incarcerated.**



Seventy-two percent of the people incarcerated within one year of their overdose death were screened for substance use upon entering the correctional facility. Those who were not screened upon incarceration were either incarcerated for one day or less, or refused, so they did not receive an intake screen.

Nearly half of people (48%) received MOUD while incarcerated. Of those who did not receive MOUD while incarcerated, 60% were released within 24 hours or less after admission and 20% did not accept the option to receive MOUD. People who had been sentenced were more likely to receive MOUD while incarcerated (62%) than those who were being detained (38%). Seventy-nine percent of people who received MOUD were incarcerated for more than one week.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to our data partners at the Vermont Department of Public Safety and the Vermont Department of Corrections. At the Department of Public Safety, we would like to thank Commissioner Jennifer Morrison, Ron LaFond, Erin Gadhue, and Betty Wheeler. At the Department of Corrections, we'd like to thank Commissioner Jon Murad, Jessica King-Mohr, and Kathleen Higgins.