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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wisconsin DOJ Announces Overdose Death Initiative

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation, in partnership with the Wisconsin National Guard Counterdrug Program, the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office, and the Washington County Sheriff's Office, is pleased to announce the Overdose Death Initiative (ODI). ODI was created in May 2024 and became an official [High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas \(HIDTA\)](#) initiative in April 2025. ODI's mission is to diligently investigate opioid overdoses and deaths, aiming to identify and apprehend the individuals directly responsible for the distribution of opioids that lead to fatalities.

ODI has been piloted in southeastern Wisconsin, and ODI investigators have assisted 16 local and county jurisdictions with their overdose cases. The support ODI provides includes state and federal resources, analysts, equipment, investigative experience, investigative funds, help working with prosecutors, and legal process support.

The work of ODI investigators in partnerships with local law enforcement has resulted in multiple seizures of narcotics, including fentanyl, cocaine, heroin, THC products, methamphetamine, psilocybin, MDMA, and illegally obtained prescription drugs. This work has also resulted in the seizure of multiple firearms, including several machine guns, and over \$275,000 in currency.

ODI investigators, in partnership with local law enforcement, have thus far investigated 21 cases, leading to 58 arrests and multiple charged criminal cases. Among the criminal charges issued are 10 reckless homicide charges. As in any criminal case, the charges are merely accusations and each defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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“This initiative shows the kind of impact that can be made through collaborative investigations relating to overdoses,” said Attorney General Josh Kaul. “Thank you to those who have been a part of this initiative.”

“This initiative represents a united front against the opioid epidemic that continues to shatter our various communities,” said Milwaukee County Sheriff Denita Ball. “Every overdose is more than a statistic—it’s a life and potentially an entire family affected by this tragedy. By working closely with our state and local partners, we are committing every available resource to identify and hold accountable those who profit from poisoning those we are sworn to protect.”

Utilizing grant funds, ODI has helped remove barriers for partners by creating a process to pay overtime to local officers who assist with ODI investigations. This takes financial burden off Wisconsin local law enforcement agencies and enables more resources to be available for overdose death investigations. Through HIDTA, ODI investigators operate in a collaborative environment alongside criminal analysts and drug task force law enforcement members from local, state, and federal agencies. ODI partnerships help enable the identification of additional links to other overdoses and drug trafficking networks. ODI partners with Homeland Security Investigations and district attorneys including those from Milwaukee County, Washington County and Waukesha County.

ODI is committed to prevention and training as well. ODI investigators have trained officers across Wisconsin in five separate overdose investigation training sessions, and, in partnership with the Wisconsin National Guard, ODI provides public health partners with high-level analytical support at no cost.