

# VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

## OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

*“To promote and protect the health of all Virginians”*

# Fatal Drug Overdose Quarterly Report

## 2<sup>ST</sup> QUARTER 2016

**Edition 2016.2**

Publication Date:  
October 2016

# METHODS, CONSIDERATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This quarterly report contains the most recent number of drug related deaths in Virginia for the previous quarter. **The numbers represented in this report are preliminary, subject to change, and are most likely slightly under reported at the time of publication** due to operational practices and limitations (specifically case turnaround time for reports) within the agency; therefore updates and/or changes to numbers previously published in past reports should be expected. It is highly recommended that when citing these data and reports, the edition number is included.

Data analyzed in the report is obtained from the Virginia Medical Examiner Database System (VMEDS). VMEDS is an internal agency database which contains detailed information on all deaths reported to the OCME, regardless of whether the OCME accepted the case or not. Data presented in this report is based upon accepted cases of either full autopsy or external exams. All manners of fatal drug overdoses (accident, homicide, suicide, and undermined) are included in this report.

Due to the nature of law enforcement and OCME death investigation, all deaths presented in this report are based upon locality of occurrence and not residential status of the decedent. The numbers and rates of these death by locality of injury and drug name/drug category are available in separate documents (<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/medical-examiner/forensic-epidemiology/>).

This report compiles data on drugs causing or contributing to death in fatal drug overdose cases. This report does not include data on drugs detected, but not contributing or causing death.

**Often, drug-related deaths have more than one drug causing or contributing to death. Therefore, deaths in which multiple categories of drugs caused or contributed to death will be represented once within each drug category, but multiple times within the entire report. Example: a fatal cocaine, heroin, and Alprazolam overdose death will be counted in the cocaine summary, the heroin summary, and the benzodiazepine summary.**

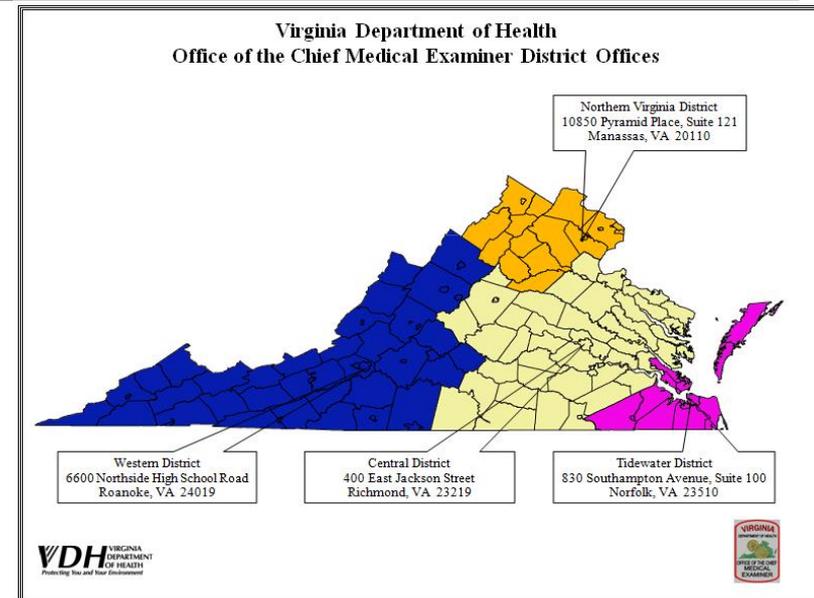
Prescription Opioids analyzed in this report include Buprenorphine, Codeine, Hydrocodone, Hydromorphone, Levorphanol, Meperidine, Methadone, Morphine, Oxycodone, Oxymorphone, Pentazocine, Propoxyphene, Tapentadol, and Tramadol and are included in the category of 'Prescription Opioids'. Benzodiazepines analyzed in this report include Alprazolam, Clonazepam, Diazepam, Flurazepam, Lorazepam, Midazolam, Nordiazepam, Oxazepam, Temazepam, and Triazolam and are included in the category of 'Benzodiazepines'.

Projected estimates for 2016 (entire year) are calculated based upon initial counts by quarter, average toxicology turnaround time at the time of the report, the date of data analysis, and previous quarter fatality trend review.

Rate calculations are based upon Virginia population projections. These population estimates came from the Virginia Department of Health, Division of Health Statistics (<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/HealthStats/stats.htm>).

Quarters are based upon the calendar year and are defined as follows:

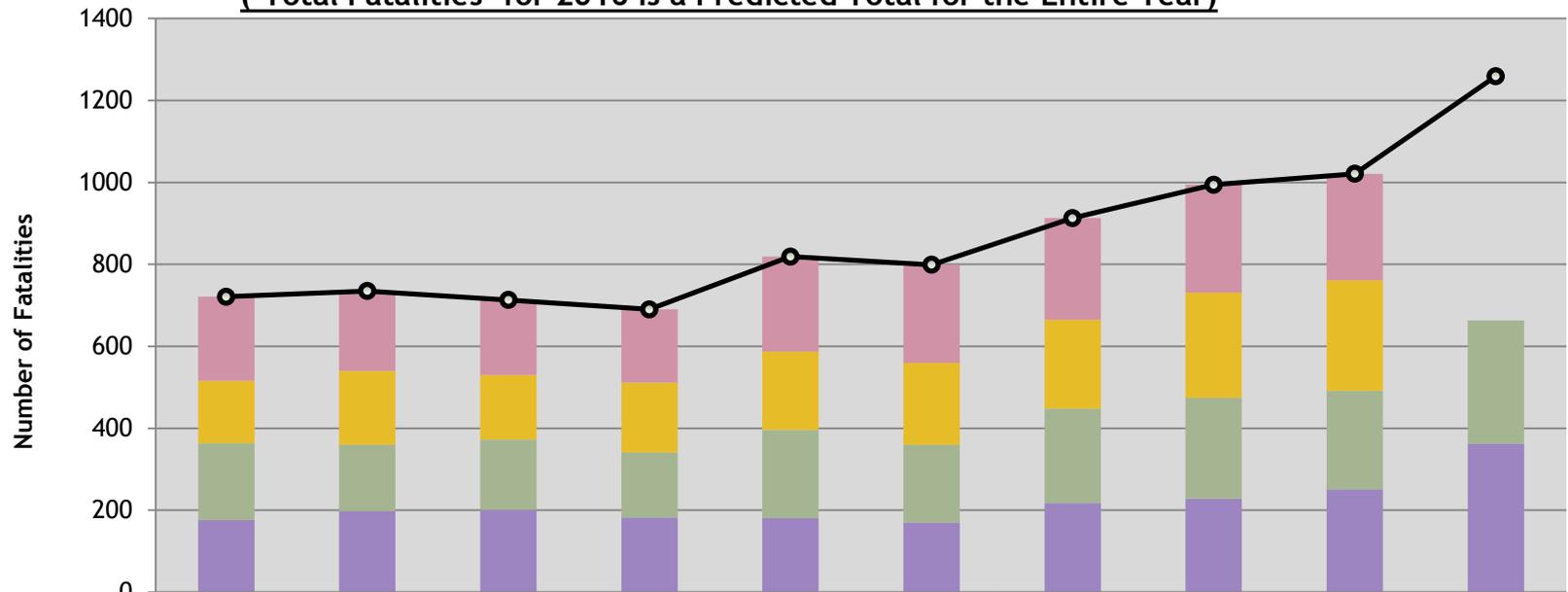
- Quarter 1 (Q1)- January 1<sup>st</sup> - March 31<sup>st</sup>
- Quarter 2 (Q2)- April 1<sup>st</sup> - June 30<sup>th</sup>
- Quarter 3 (Q3)- July 1<sup>st</sup> - September 31<sup>st</sup>
- Quarter 4 (Q4)- October 1<sup>st</sup> - December 31<sup>st</sup>



# ALL DRUGS

The total number of fatal drug overdoses statewide have been increasing each year. In 2013, fatal drug overdose became the number one method of unnatural death in the Commonwealth, surpassing both motor vehicle-related fatalities and gun-related fatalities. In 2014, fatal drug overdose became the leading cause of accidental death in Virginia. The first half of 2016 had a 34.8% increase in the number of fatal drug overdoses compared to the same time frame (Q1 and Q2) of 2015.

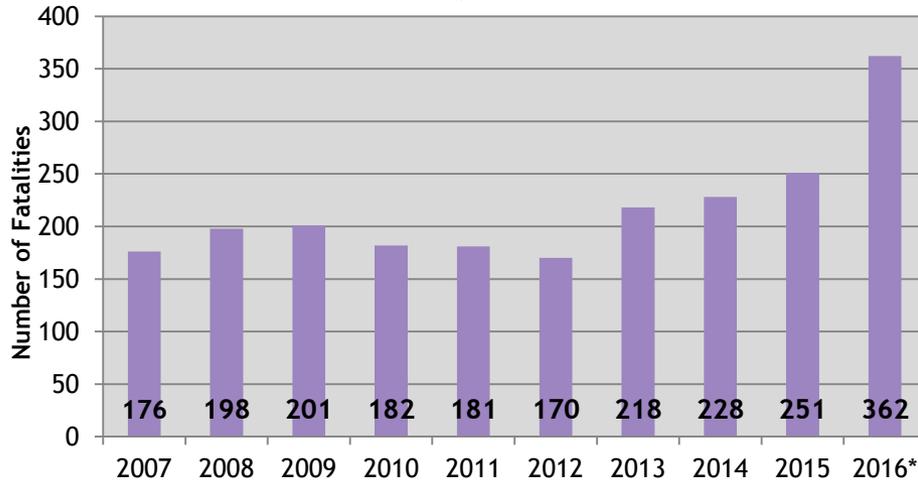
**Total Number of Fatal Drug Overdoses by Quarter and Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
 ('Total Fatalities' for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



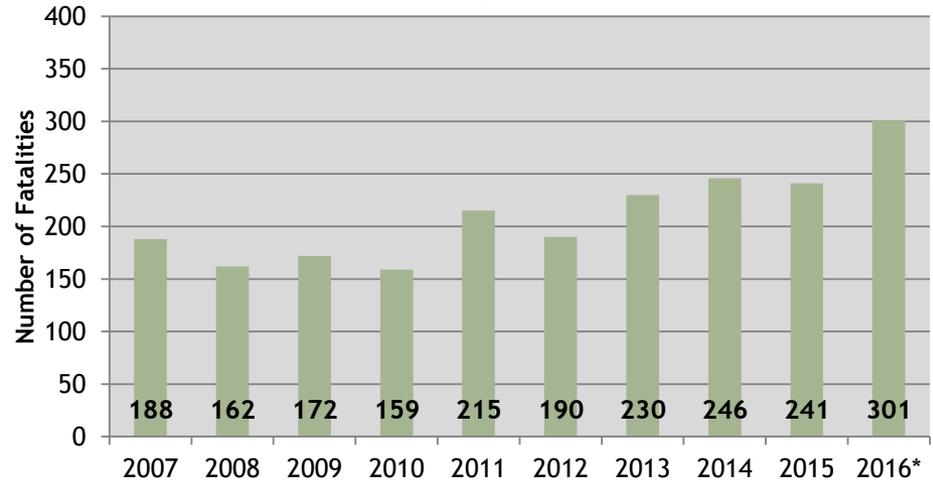
|                  | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016* |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Q4               | 205  | 195  | 183  | 179  | 232  | 240  | 248  | 263  | 260  |       |
| Q3               | 152  | 180  | 157  | 170  | 191  | 199  | 217  | 257  | 269  |       |
| Q2               | 188  | 162  | 172  | 159  | 215  | 190  | 230  | 246  | 241  | 301   |
| Q1               | 176  | 198  | 201  | 182  | 181  | 170  | 218  | 228  | 251  | 362   |
| Total Fatalities | 721  | 735  | 713  | 690  | 819  | 799  | 913  | 994  | 1021 | 1259  |

# ALL DRUGS

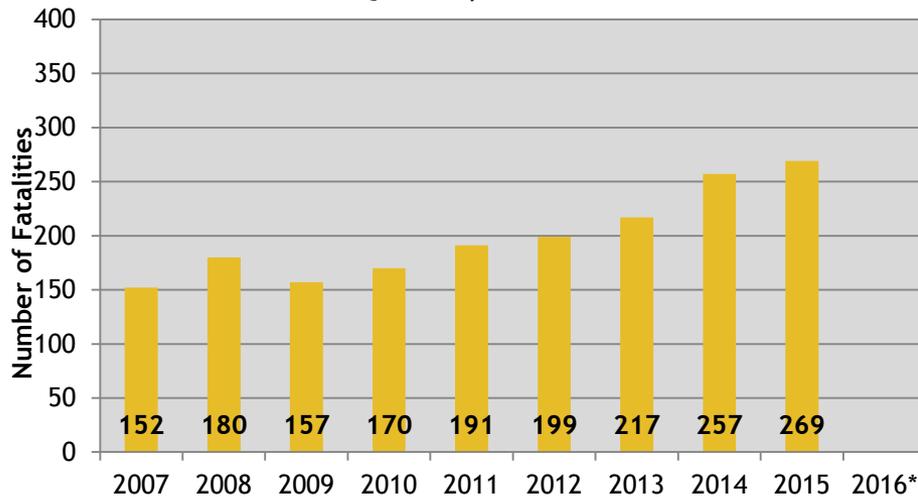
First Quarter, 2007-2016



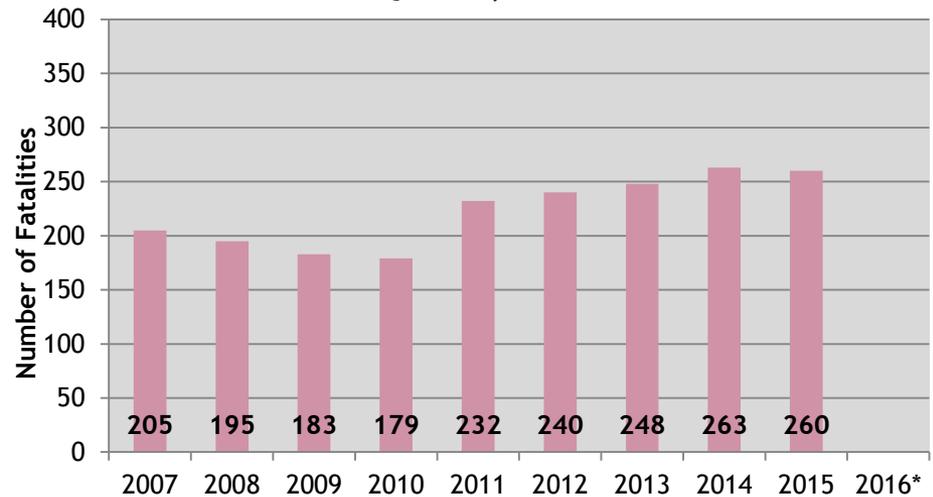
Second Quarter, 2007-2016



Third Quarter, 2007-2016



Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016

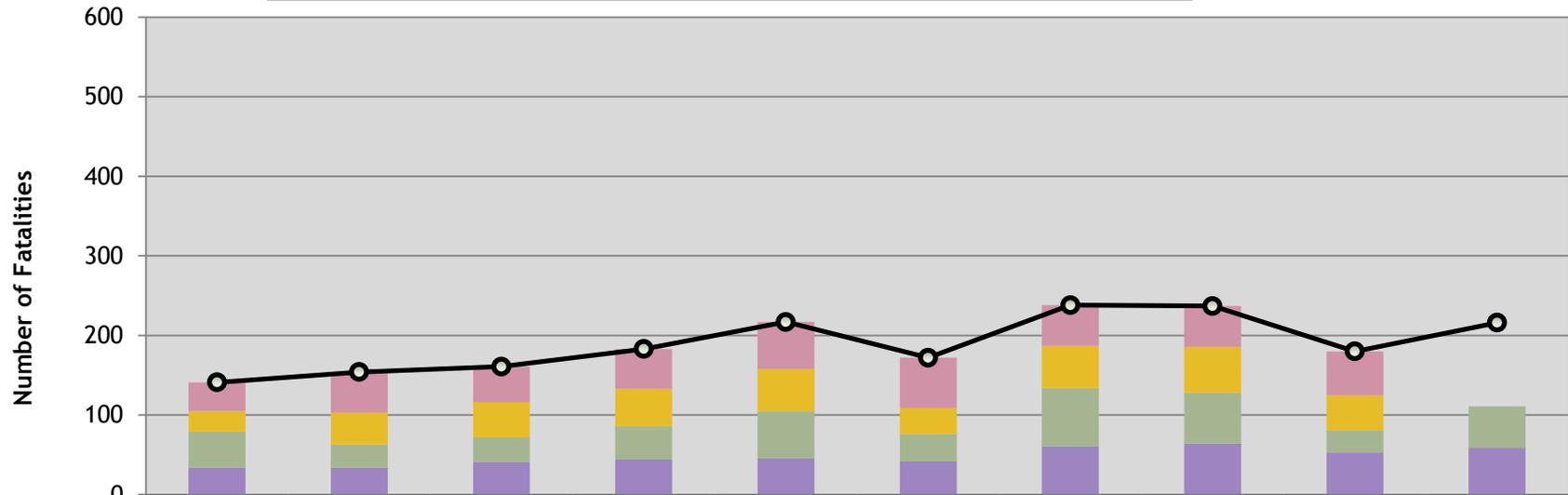




# BENZODIAZEPINES

The number of fatal benzodiazepine-related overdoses have fluctuated each year. It is very uncommon for a decedent to fatally overdose on one or more benzodiazepines alone. However, when a person ingests other substances (e.g. alcohol, opiates, methamphetamine) in addition to larger, nontherapeutic amounts of benzodiazepines, the user is potentially creating a lethal cocktail of mixed substances. Nearly 80% of all fatal benzodiazepine overdoses over the 9 year time span (2007-2015) had one or more prescription opioids (excluding fentanyl) causing or contributing to death.

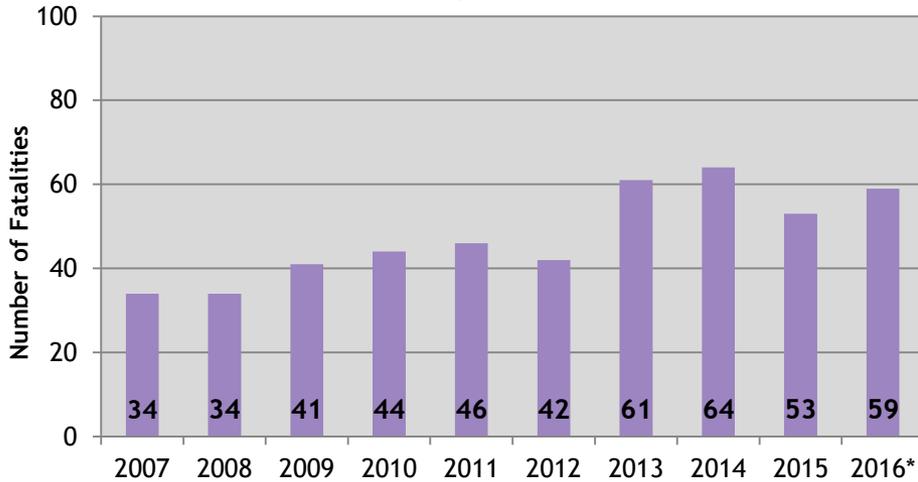
**Total Number of Fatal Benzodiazepine Overdoses by Quarter and Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
 ('Total Fatalities' for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



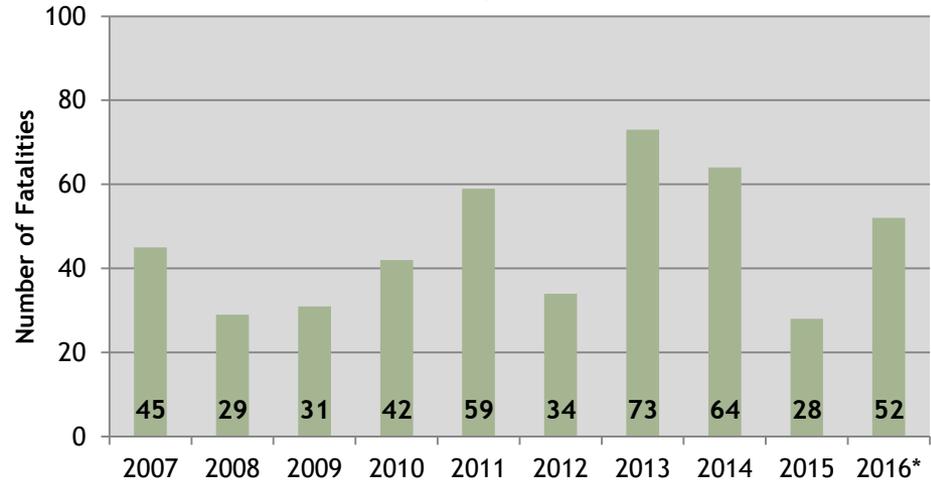
|                    | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016* |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Q4                 | 36   | 51   | 45   | 50   | 59   | 63   | 51   | 51   | 55   |       |
| Q3                 | 26   | 40   | 44   | 47   | 53   | 33   | 53   | 58   | 44   |       |
| Q2                 | 45   | 29   | 31   | 42   | 59   | 34   | 73   | 64   | 28   | 52    |
| Q1                 | 34   | 34   | 41   | 44   | 46   | 42   | 61   | 64   | 53   | 59    |
| ○ Total Fatalities | 141  | 154  | 161  | 183  | 217  | 172  | 238  | 237  | 180  | 216   |

# BENZODIAZEPINES

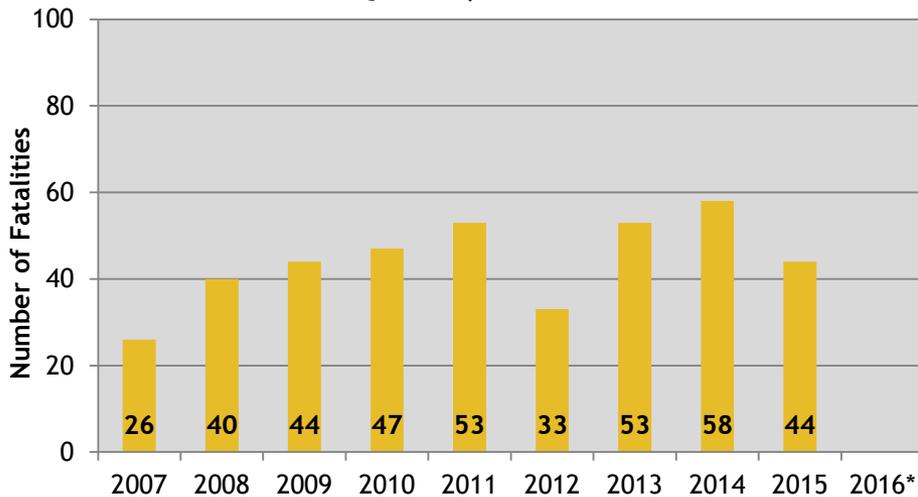
First Quarter, 2007-2016



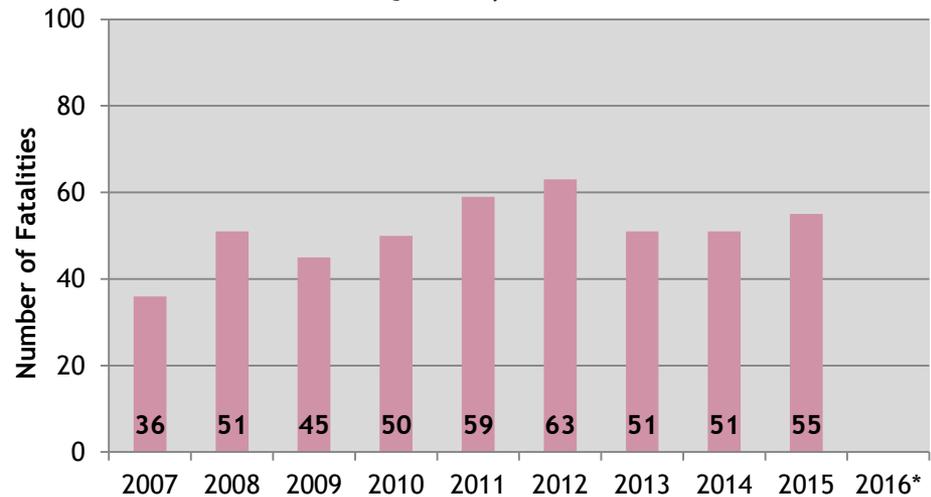
Second Quarter, 2007-2016



Third Quarter, 2007-2016

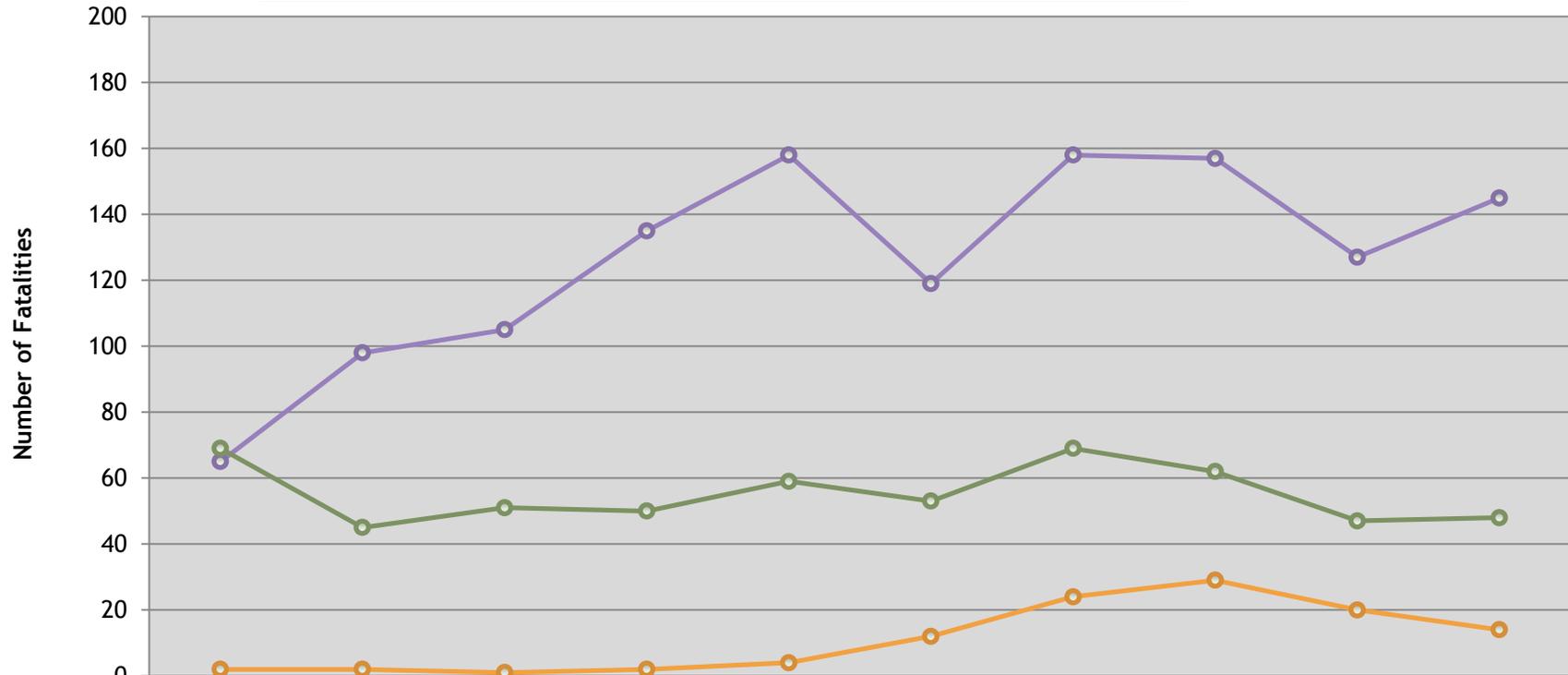


Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016



# BENZODIAZEPINES

Total Number of Fatal Benzodiazepine Overdoses by Drug Name and Year of Death, 2007-2016  
 ('Total Fatalities' for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



|            | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016* |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Alprazolam | 65   | 98   | 105  | 135  | 158  | 119  | 158  | 157  | 127  | 145   |
| Clonazepam | 2    | 2    | 1    | 2    | 4    | 12   | 24   | 29   | 20   | 14    |
| Diazepam   | 69   | 45   | 51   | 50   | 59   | 53   | 69   | 62   | 47   | 48    |

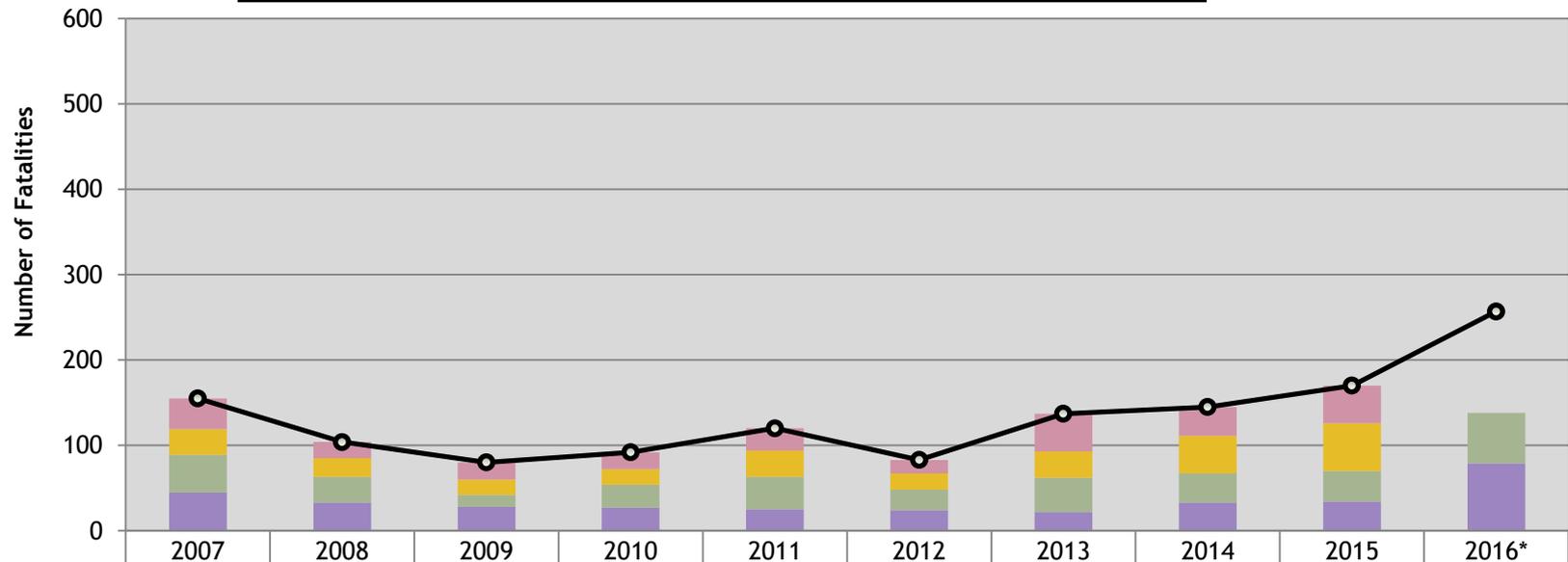
<sup>1</sup> Flurazepam, Lorazepam, Midazolam, Nordiazepam, Oxazepam, Temazepam and Triazolam were excluded from this analysis because of low annual case counts (<20 per year)

<sup>2</sup> Each benzodiazepine is tallied by each time it caused or contributed to death (analyzed from either toxicology or the cause of death statement) and therefore the total number of benzodiazepines will far exceed the actual number of fatalities

# COCAINE

The total number of fatal cocaine-related overdoses statewide have slowly been increasing since 2013. Fatal cocaine overdoses from 2007-2015 typically occurred as the only substance causing or contributing to death, or in addition to lethal combinations of one or more opioid prescription drugs (excluding fentanyl) (36.6%), heroin (24.6%), and/or alcohol at or above the legal limit of 0.08% BAC (16.0%). The first half of 2016 had a 97.1% increase in the number of fatal cocaine overdoses compared to the same time frame (Q1 and Q2) of 2015.

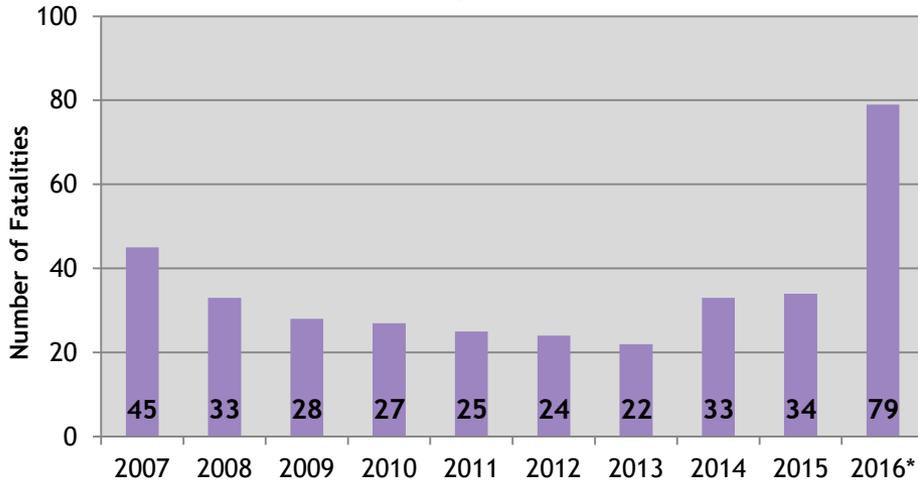
**Total Number of Fatal Cocaine Overdoses by Quarter and Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
 ('Total Fatalities' for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



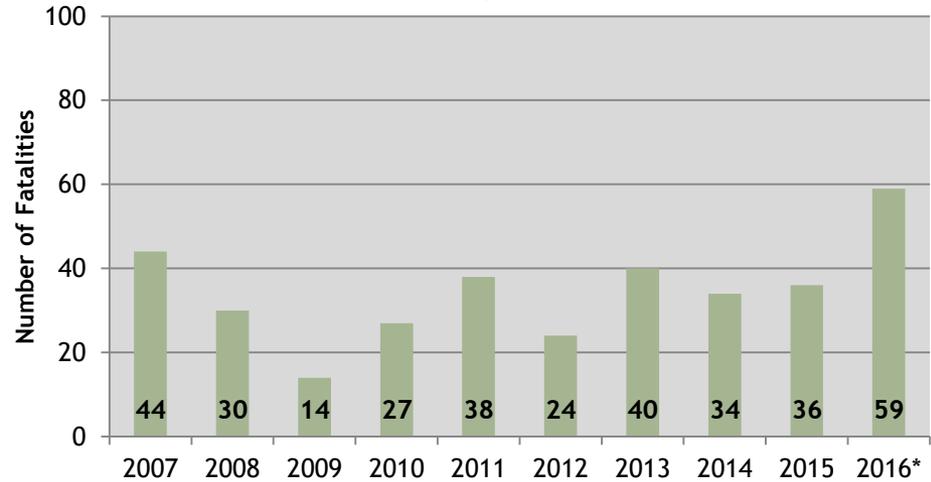
|                  | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016* |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Q4               | 36   | 19   | 20   | 20   | 26   | 16   | 44   | 34   | 44   |       |
| Q3               | 30   | 22   | 18   | 18   | 31   | 19   | 31   | 44   | 56   |       |
| Q2               | 44   | 30   | 14   | 27   | 38   | 24   | 40   | 34   | 36   | 59    |
| Q1               | 45   | 33   | 28   | 27   | 25   | 24   | 22   | 33   | 34   | 79    |
| Total Fatalities | 155  | 104  | 80   | 92   | 120  | 83   | 137  | 145  | 170  | 257   |

# COCAINE

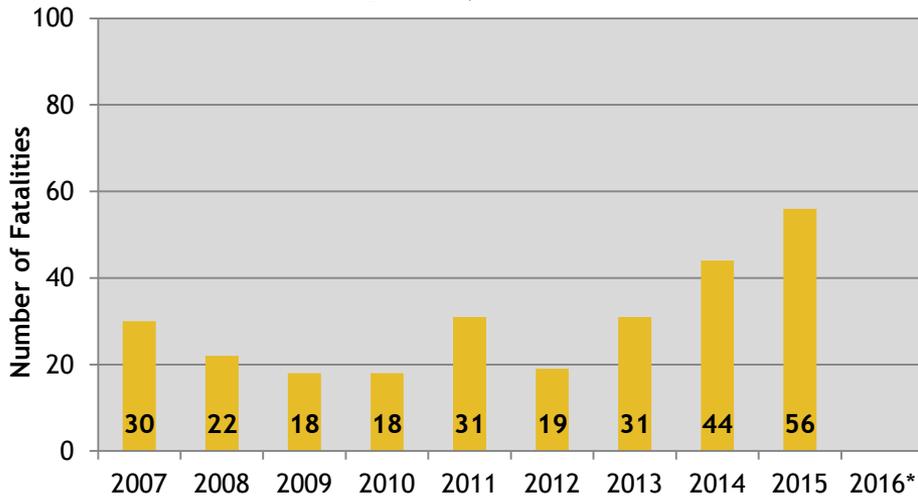
First Quarter, 2007-2016



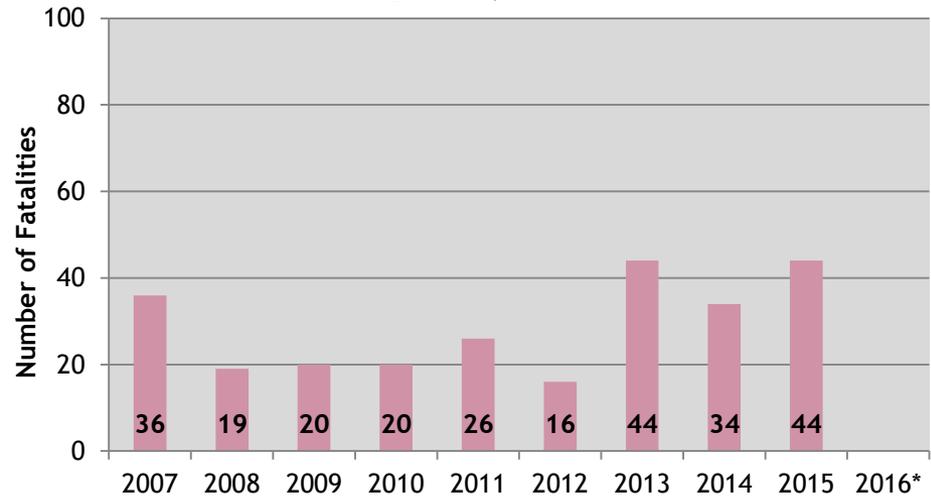
Second Quarter, 2007-2016



Third Quarter, 2007-2016



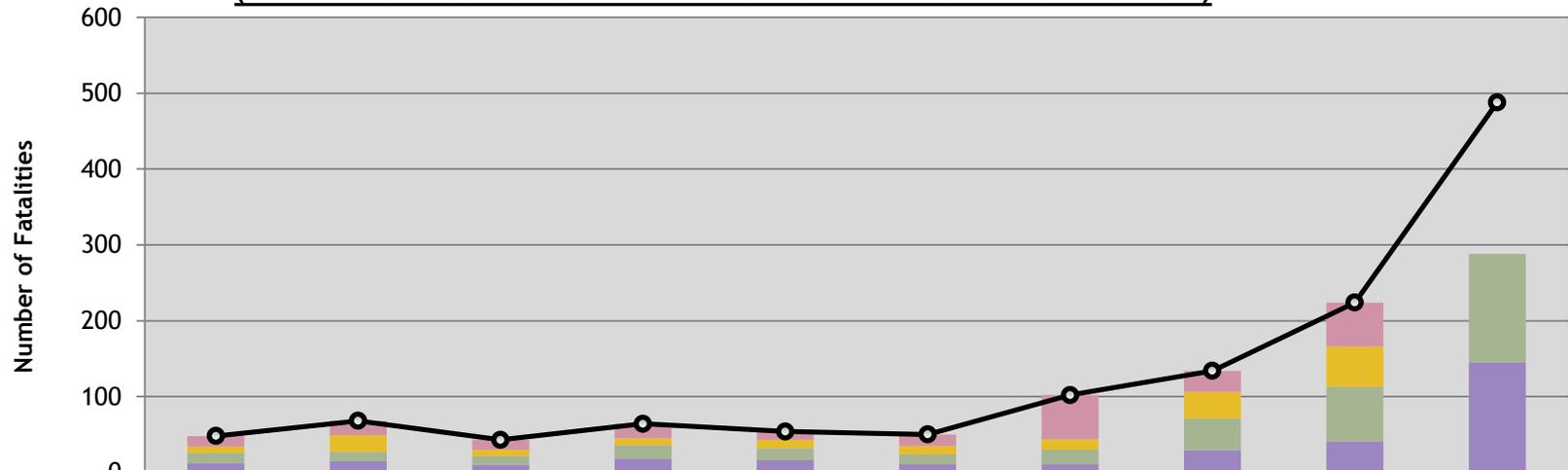
Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016



# FENTANYL

The total number of fatal fentanyl-related drug overdoses have sharply increased since 2012; which coincides with the dramatic increase in fatal heroin overdoses. Prior to 2013, most fentanyl-related deaths were due to illicit use of pharmaceutically produced fentanyl. However, in late 2013, early 2014, law enforcement investigations and toxicology testing demonstrated an increase in illicitly produced fentanyl. By 2016, most fatal fentanyl-related overdoses were due to illicitly produced fentanyl and fentanyl analogs, and not pharmaceutically produced fentanyl. The first half of 2016 had a 154.9% increase in the number of fatal fentanyl overdoses compared to the same time frame (Q1 and Q2) of 2015.

**Total Number of Fatal Fentanyl Overdoses by Quarter and Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
 ('Total Fatalities' for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



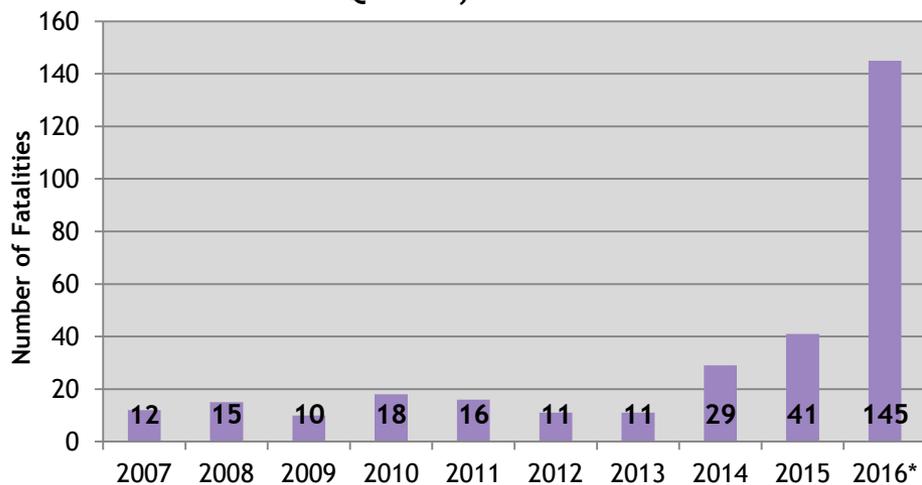
|                    | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016* |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Q4                 | 14   | 19   | 13   | 19   | 11   | 15   | 58   | 28   | 58   |       |
| Q3                 | 8    | 22   | 8    | 9    | 11   | 11   | 14   | 35   | 53   |       |
| Q2                 | 14   | 12   | 12   | 18   | 16   | 13   | 19   | 42   | 72   | 143   |
| Q1                 | 12   | 15   | 10   | 18   | 16   | 11   | 11   | 29   | 41   | 145   |
| ● Total Fatalities | 48   | 68   | 43   | 64   | 54   | 50   | 102  | 134  | 224  | 488   |

<sup>1</sup> Historically, fentanyl has been categorized as a prescription opioid because it is mass produced by pharmaceutical companies. However, recent law enforcement investigations and toxicology results have demonstrated that several recent fentanyl seizures have not been pharmaceutically produced, but illicitly produced. This illicit form of fentanyl is produced by international drug traffickers who import the drug into the United States and often, mix it into heroin being sold. This illicitly produced fentanyl, especially fentanyl mixed with heroin, has been the biggest contributor to the significant increase in the number of fatal opioid overdoses in Virginia.

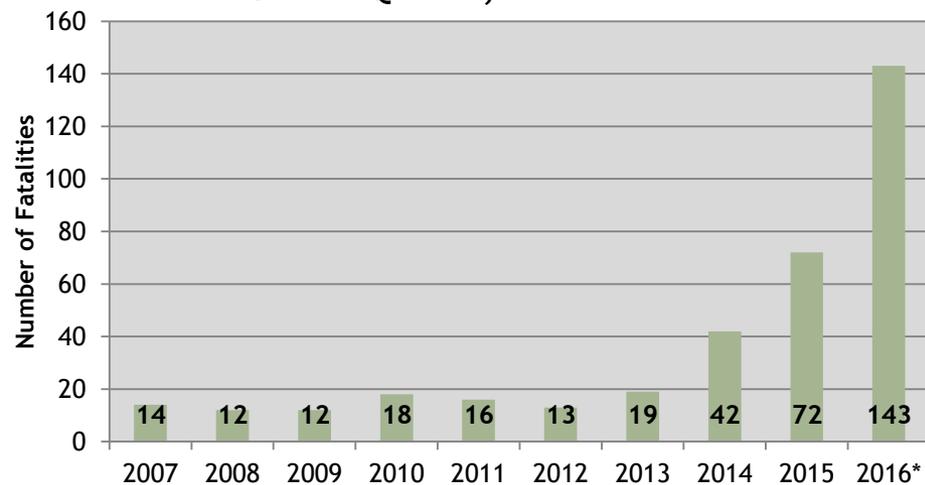
<sup>2</sup> Illicit and pharmaceutically produced fatal fentanyl overdoses are represented in this analysis. This includes all different types of fentanyl analogs (acetyl fentanyl, furanyl fentanyl, etc.)

# FENTANYL

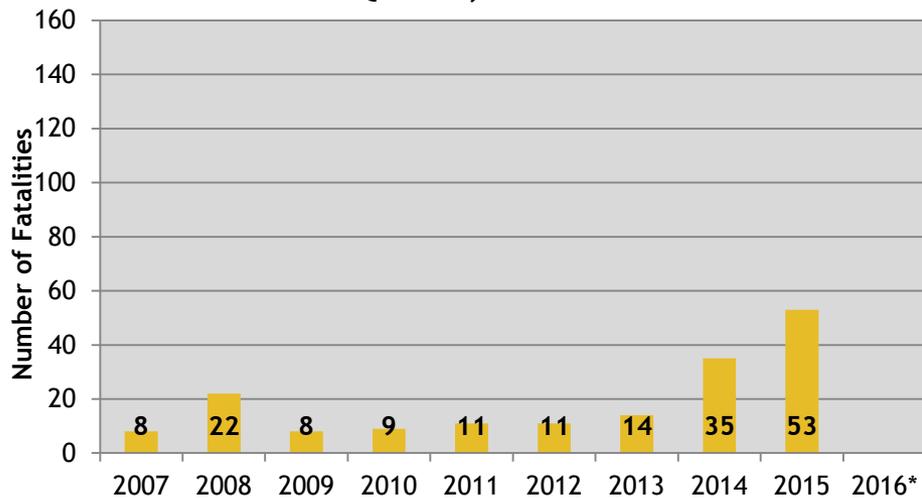
First Quarter, 2007-2016



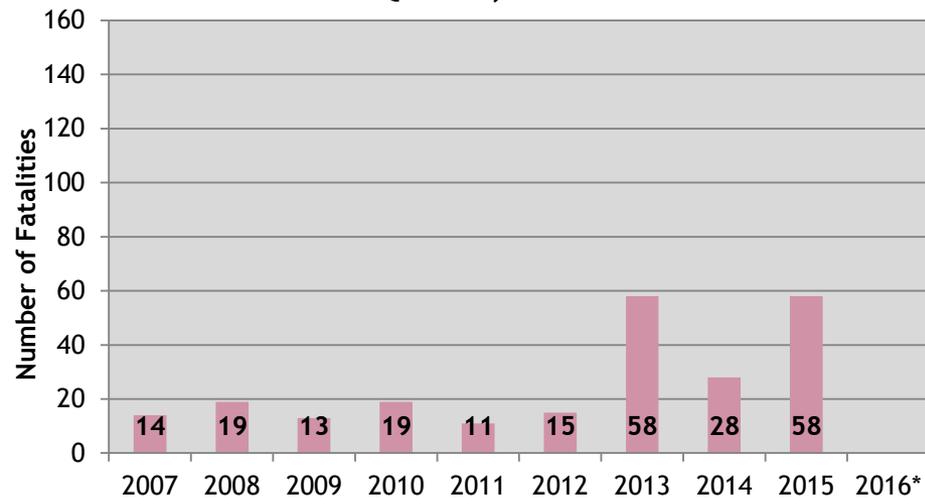
Second Quarter, 2007-2016



Third Quarter, 2007-2016



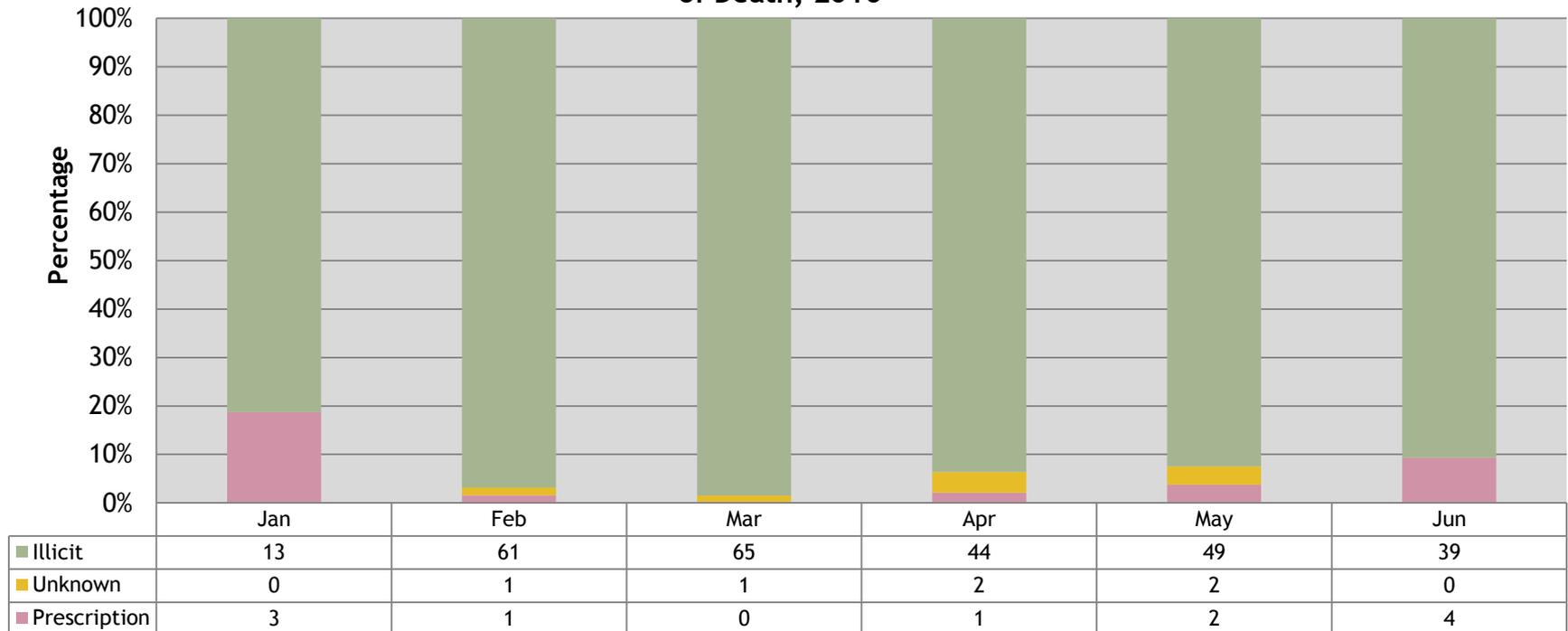
Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016



# FENTANYL

In 2016, the OCME began collecting information on the suspected origin of fentanyl (pharmaceutical production, illicit production, or unknown) on all fatal overdoses involving fentanyl. The determination is made by reviewing the examination report, toxicology report, police report, and several other sources of information collected during the death investigation process. This classification is more subjective than objective, but still provides detailed insight to the current proportion of illicitly produced fentanyl in Virginia that is contributing to fatal overdoses. In the first half of 2016, it was estimated that over 94% of fatal fentanyl overdoses were due to the illicitly produced versions of the drug.

**Total Number and Percentage of Fatal Fentanyl Overdoses by Fentanyl Origin and Month of Death, 2016**



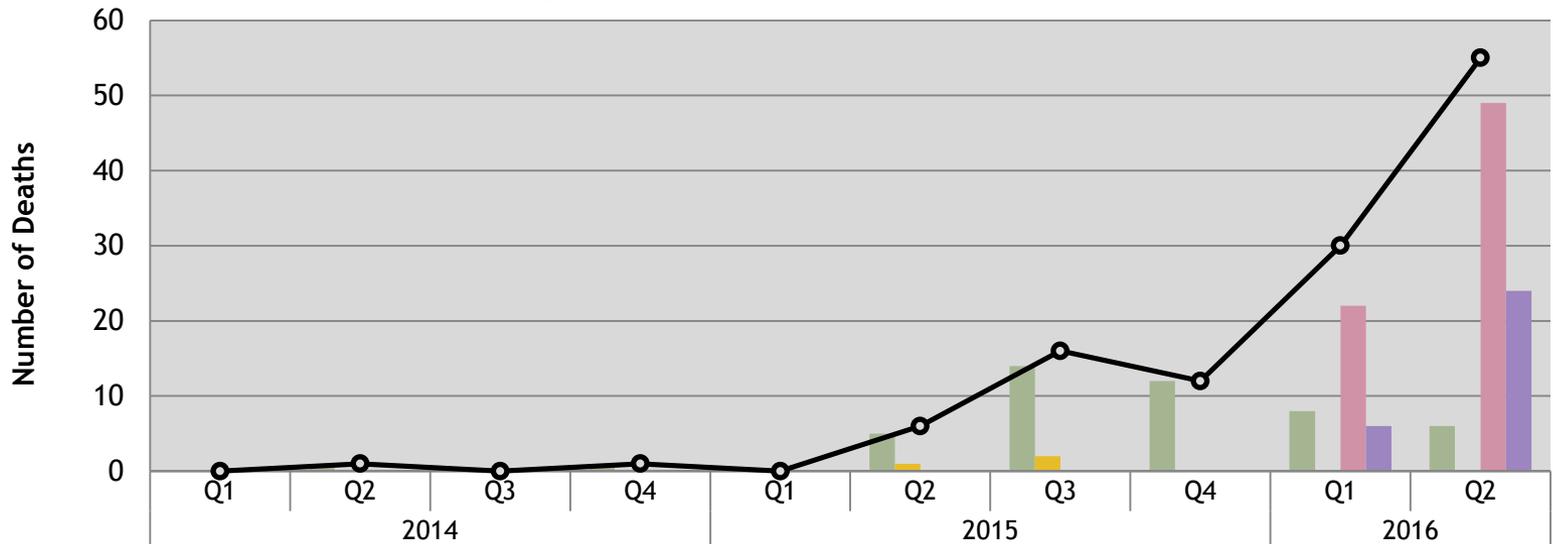
<sup>1</sup> Historically, fentanyl has been categorized as a prescription opioid because it is mass produced by pharmaceutical companies. However, recent law enforcement investigations and toxicology results have demonstrated that several recent fentanyl seizures have not been pharmaceutically produced, but illicitly produced. This illicit form of fentanyl is produced by international drug traffickers who import the drug into the United States and often, mix it into heroin being sold. This illicitly produced fentanyl, especially fentanyl mixed with heroin, has been the biggest contributor to the significant increase in the number of fatal opioid overdoses in Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> Illicit and pharmaceutically produced fatal fentanyl overdoses are represented in this analysis. This includes all different types of fentanyl analogs (acetyl fentanyl, furanyl fentanyl, etc.)

# FENTANYL ANALOGS

Fentanyl analogs are a category of illicitly produced opioids very similar to fentanyl, but slightly different in their chemical structure. Fentanyl analogs began appearing in Virginia in 2014 and have risen dramatically since the beginning of 2016. In fatal overdoses, fentanyl analogs are most commonly found with fentanyl and/or two different fentanyl analogs together, and/or heroin or cocaine. Furthermore, some fatal fentanyl analog overdoses have also been due to the analog itself, without other drugs detected in toxicology. Fentanyl analogs are illicitly produced and are extremely potent, and can be blamed in part for the significant rise in fatal overdoses due to opioids. For statistical purposes, 'fentanyl' includes all pharmaceutically produced fentanyl, illicitly produced fentanyl, and fentanyl analogs.

**Total Number of Fatal Fentanyl Analog Overdoses by Quarter and Year of Death, 2014-2016**



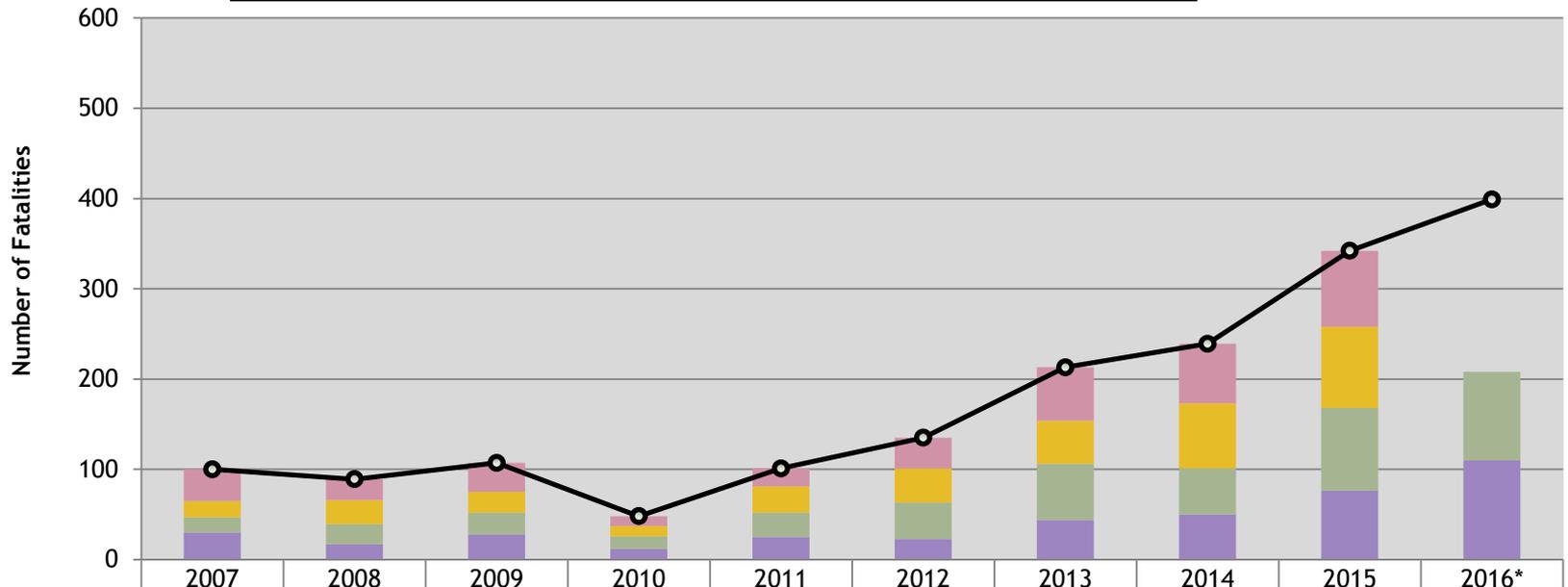
|                               | 2014     |          |          |          | 2015     |          |           |           | 2016      |           |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                               | Q1       | Q2       | Q3       | Q4       | Q1       | Q2       | Q3        | Q4        | Q1        | Q2        |
| Acetyl Fentanyl               | 0        | 1        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 5        | 14        | 12        | 8         | 6         |
| Butyryl Fentanyl              | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 2         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Despropionyl Fentanyl         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0         | 0         | 22        | 49        |
| Furanyl Fentanyl              | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0         | 0         | 6         | 24        |
| <b>Total Fentanyl Analogs</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>30</b> | <b>55</b> |

<sup>1</sup> Each fentanyl analog is tallied by each time it caused or contributed to death (analyzed from either toxicology or the cause of death statement) and therefore the total number of analogs will far exceed the actual number of fatalities

# HEROIN

The total number of fatal heroin-related overdoses have been increasing since 2010. Fatal heroin overdoses often occur as the primary drug causing death, but more recently, fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs in addition to heroin have caused fatal overdoses. The first half of 2016 had a 23.8% increase in the number of fatal heroin overdoses compared to the same time frame (Q1 and Q2) of 2015.

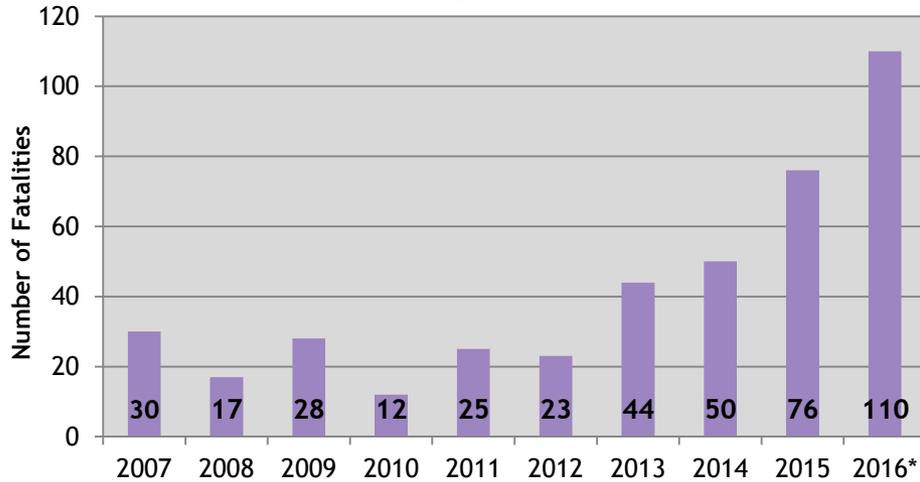
**Total Number of Fatal Heroin Overdoses by Quarter and Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
(‘Total Fatalities’ for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



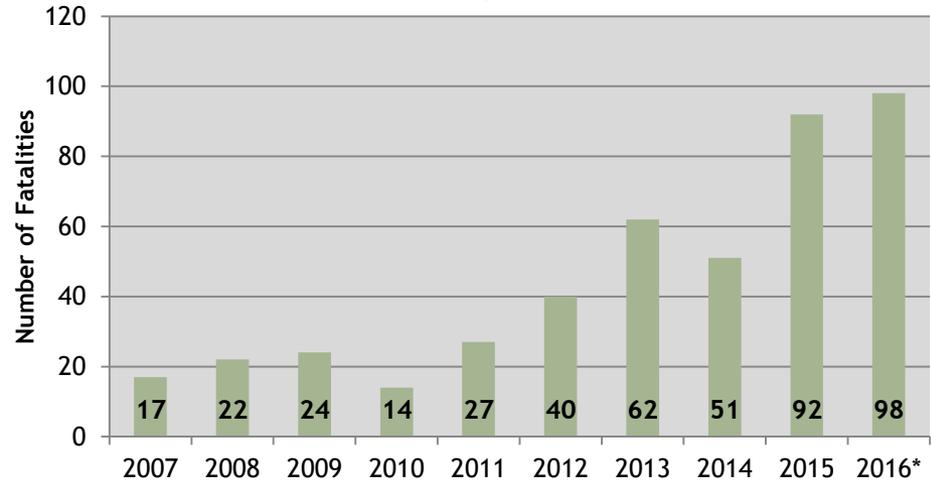
|                    | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016* |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Q4                 | 35   | 23   | 32   | 11   | 20   | 34   | 59   | 66   | 84   |       |
| Q3                 | 18   | 27   | 23   | 11   | 29   | 38   | 48   | 72   | 90   |       |
| Q2                 | 17   | 22   | 24   | 14   | 27   | 40   | 62   | 51   | 92   | 98    |
| Q1                 | 30   | 17   | 28   | 12   | 25   | 23   | 44   | 50   | 76   | 110   |
| ● Total Fatalities | 100  | 89   | 107  | 48   | 101  | 135  | 213  | 239  | 342  | 399   |

# HEROIN

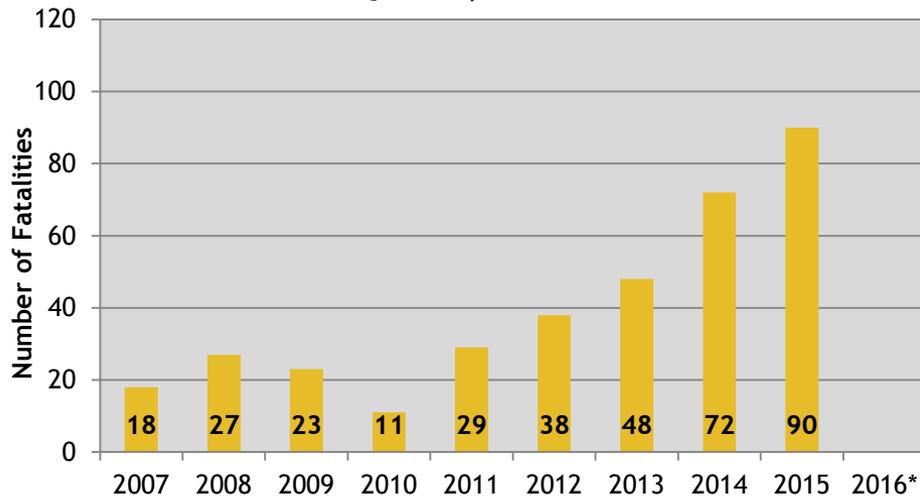
First Quarter, 2007-2016



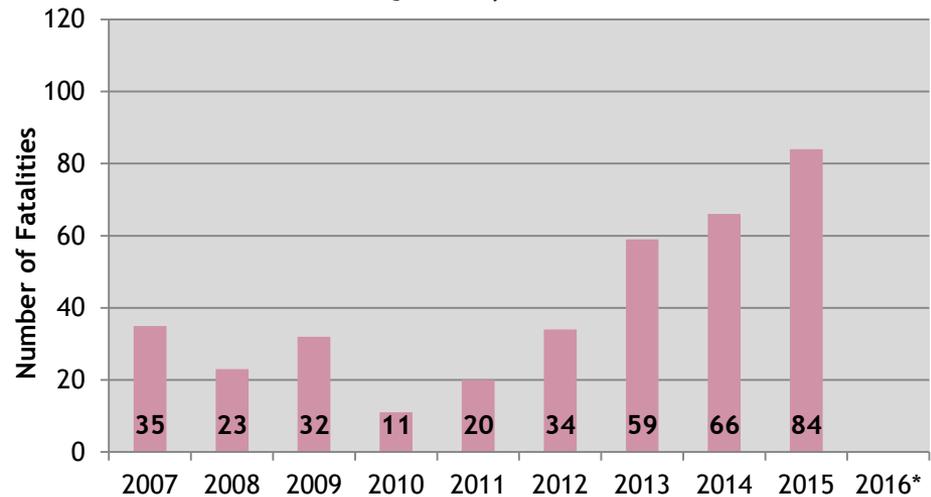
Second Quarter, 2007-2016



Third Quarter, 2007-2016



Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016

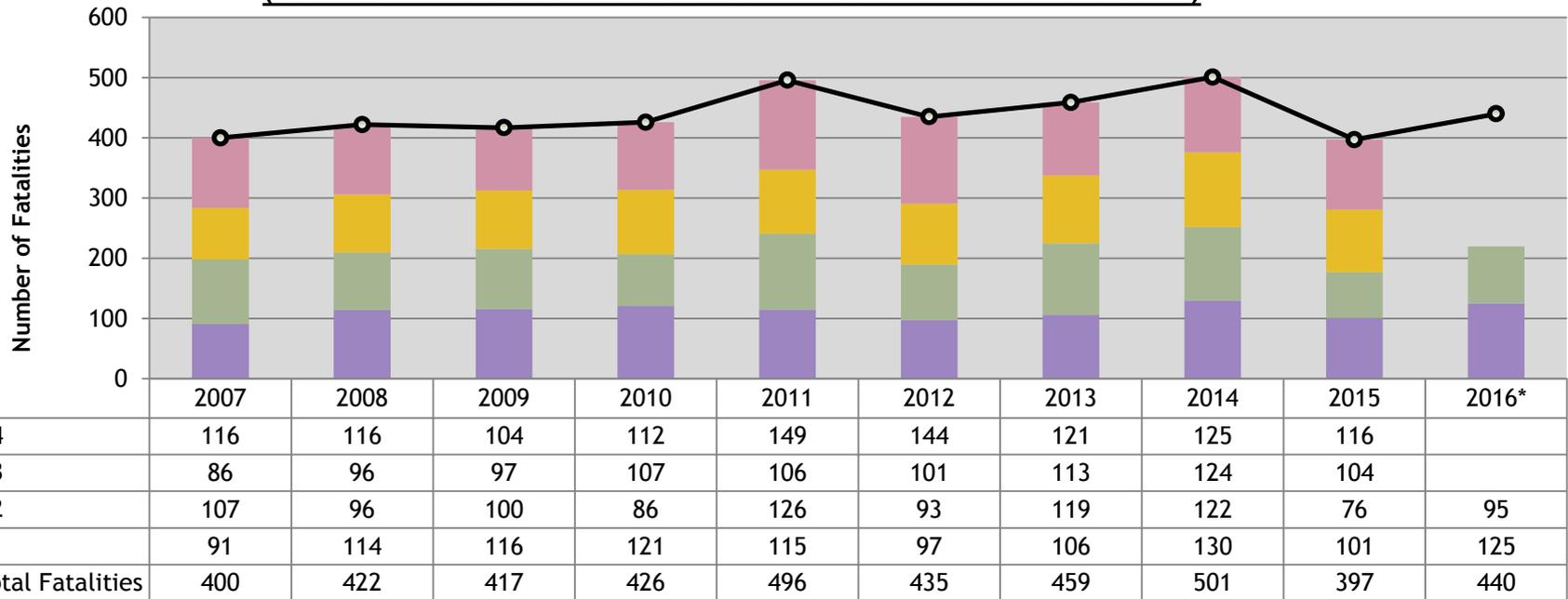


# PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS (EXCLUDING FENTANYL)

Since 2007, fatal prescription (Rx) opioid overdoses have been the leading category of drugs causing or contributing to death in the Commonwealth, with historically, Oxycodone being the most common drug. Given the transition in fatal fentanyl overdoses from pharmaceutically produced fentanyl (2007-2014) to nearly all illicitly produced fentanyl (2015-present), fentanyl needs to be removed from the Rx opioid category and analyzed separately. This allows one to see the significant impact the drug is having on fatal overdose numbers in Virginia. By removing fentanyl from this Rx category, it is to be expected that Rx opioid fatalities from 2007-2013 to be slightly undercounted because true Rx fentanyl overdoses are excluded and combined with all 'fentanyl' to capture recent trends of illicit fentanyl in Virginia.

**Total Number of Fatal Prescription Opioid Overdoses (Excluding Fentanyl) by Quarter and Year of Death, 2007-2016**

**(‘Total Fatalities’ for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)**

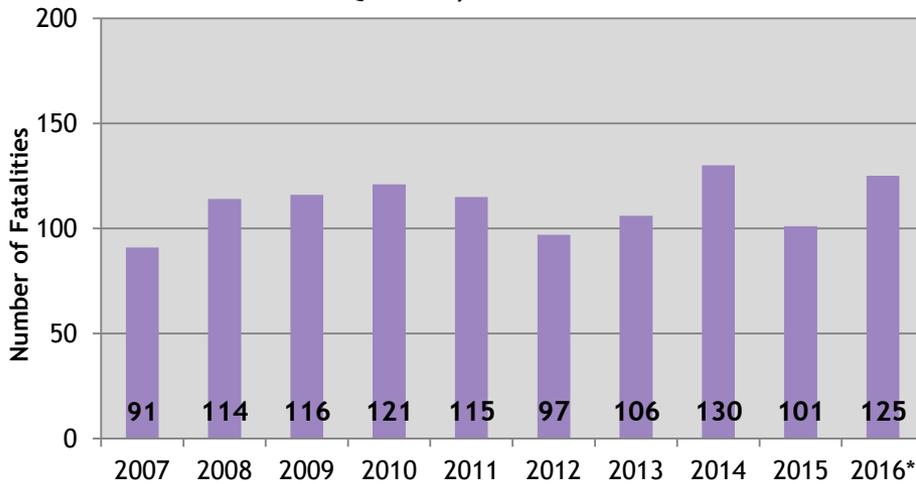


<sup>1</sup> 'Prescription Opioids (excluding fentanyl)' calculates all deaths in which one or more prescription opioids caused or contributed to death, but excludes fentanyl from the **required list** of prescription opioid drugs used to calculate the numbers. However, given that some of these deaths have multiple drugs on board, some deaths may have fentanyl in addition to other prescriptions opioids, and are therefore counted in the total number. Analysis must be done this way because by excluding all deaths in which fentanyl caused or contributed to death, the calculation would also exclude other prescription opioid deaths (oxycodone, methadone, etc.) from the analysis and would thereby undercount the actual number of fatalities due to these true prescription opioids.

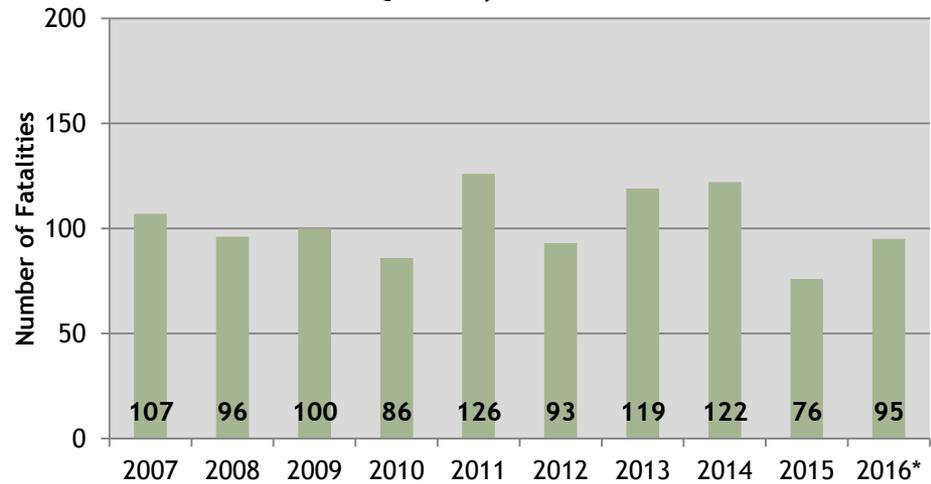
<sup>2</sup> Fatal prescription opioid numbers have changed slightly from past reports due to the removal of fentanyl from the category, as well as the addition of buprenorphine, levorphanol, meperidine, pentazocine, propoxyphene, and tapentadol added to the list of prescription opioids.

# PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS (EXCLUDING FENTANYL)

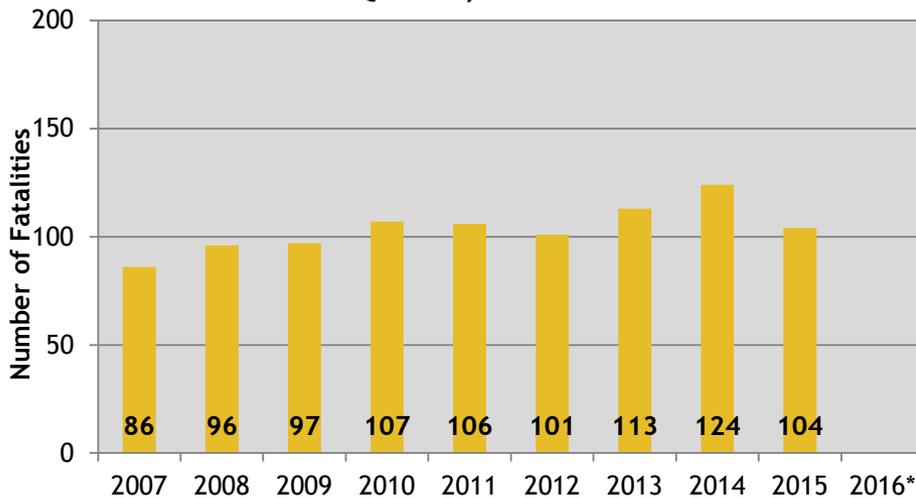
First Quarter, 2007-2016



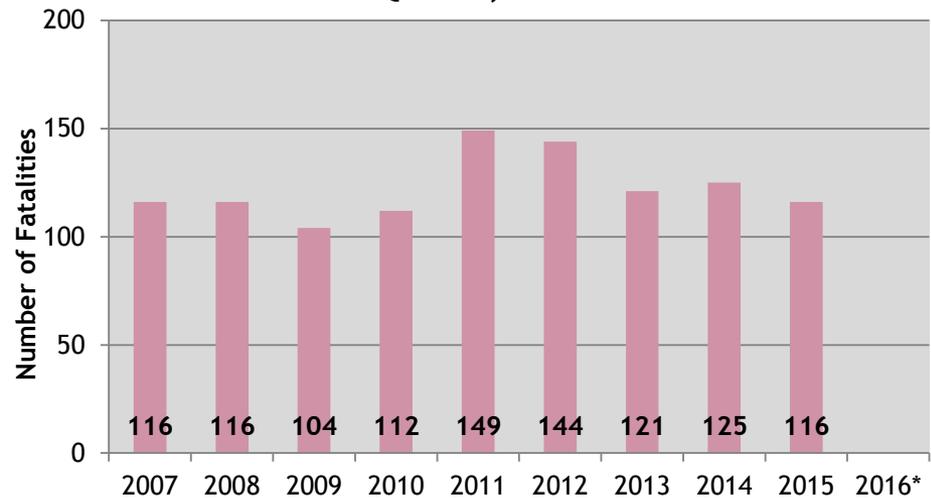
Second Quarter, 2007-2016



Third Quarter, 2007-2016



Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016



# FATAL DRUG OVERDOSES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

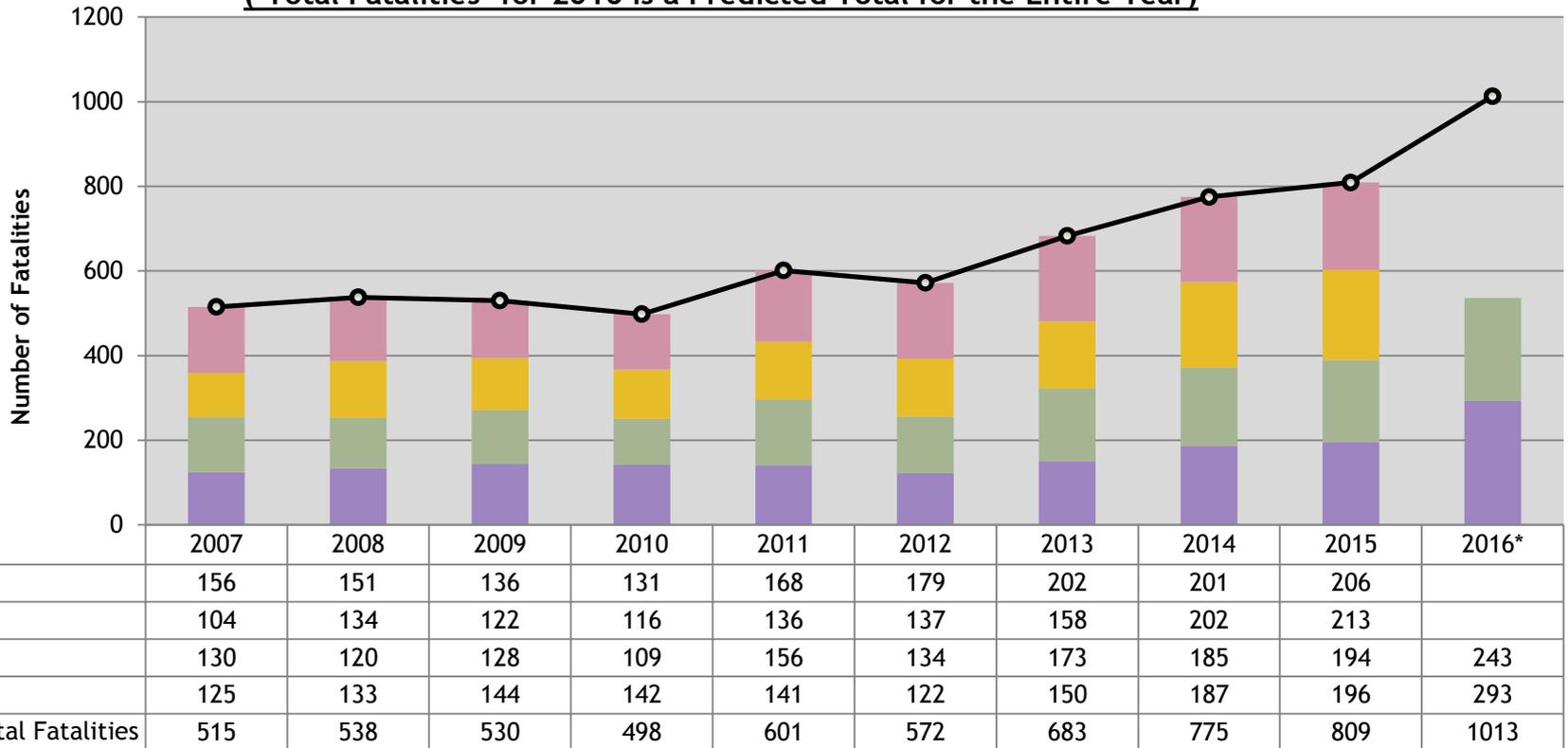


- All Opioids (Fentanyl, Heroin, and/or Prescription Opioids)
- Heroin and/or Fentanyl

# ALL OPIOIDS

From 2007-2015, opioids (fentanyl, heroin, and/or one or more prescription opioids) made up approximately 75% of all fatal drug overdoses annually in Virginia. However, this percentage is increasing each year due to the significant increase in fatal fentanyl and/or heroin overdoses beginning in late 2013 and early 2014. Of the fatal opioid overdoses from 2007-2015, 26.8% had one or more benzodiazepines contributing to death.

**Total Number of Fatal Opioid Overdoses by Quarter and Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
 ('Total Fatalities' for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



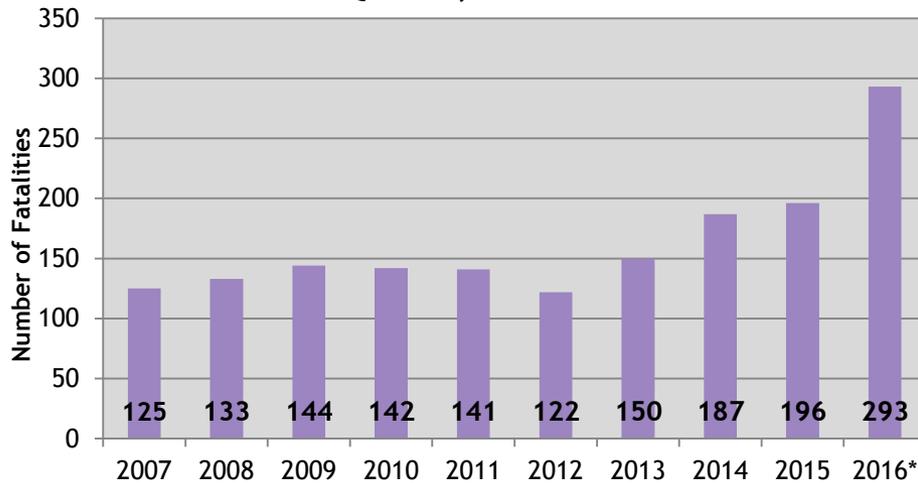
<sup>1</sup> 'All Opioids' include all versions of fentanyl, heroin, prescription opioids, and opioids unspecified

<sup>2</sup> 'Opioids Unspecified' are a small category of deaths in which the determination of heroin and/or one or more prescription opioids cannot be made due to specific circumstances of the death. Most commonly, these circumstances are a result of death several days after an overdose, in which the OCME cannot test for toxicology because the substances have been metabolized out of the decedent's system.

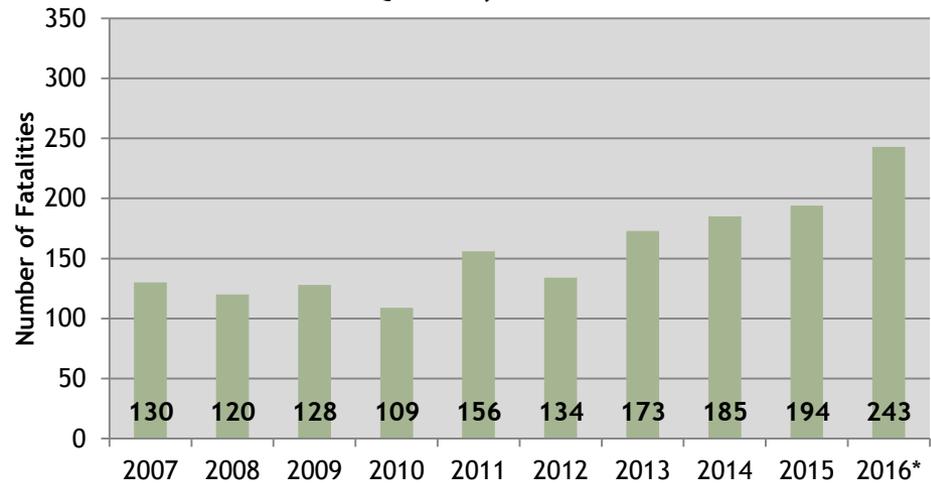
<sup>3</sup> Fatal opioid numbers have changed slightly from past reports due to the removal of fentanyl from the category of prescription opioids, as well as the addition of buprenorphine, levorphanol, meperidine, pentazocine, propoxyphene, and tapentadol added to the list of prescription opioids.

# ALL OPIOIDS

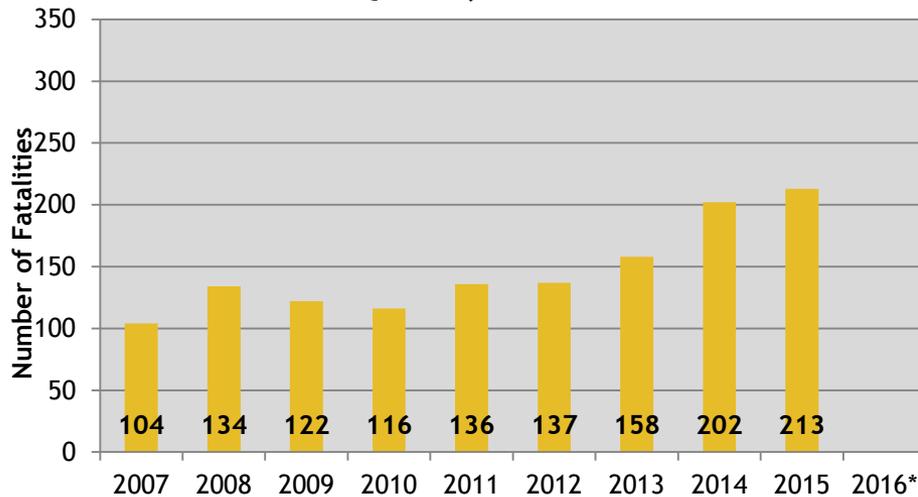
## First Quarter, 2007-2016



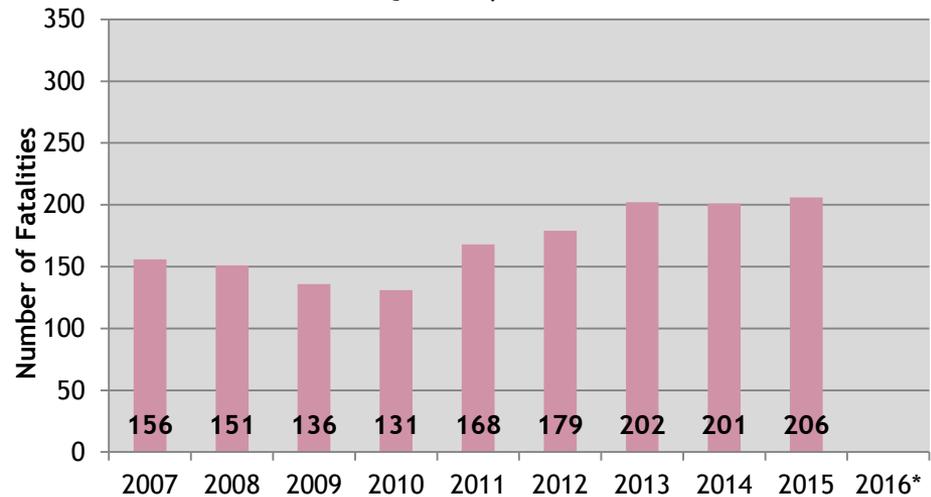
## Second Quarter, 2007-2016



## Third Quarter, 2007-2016



## Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016

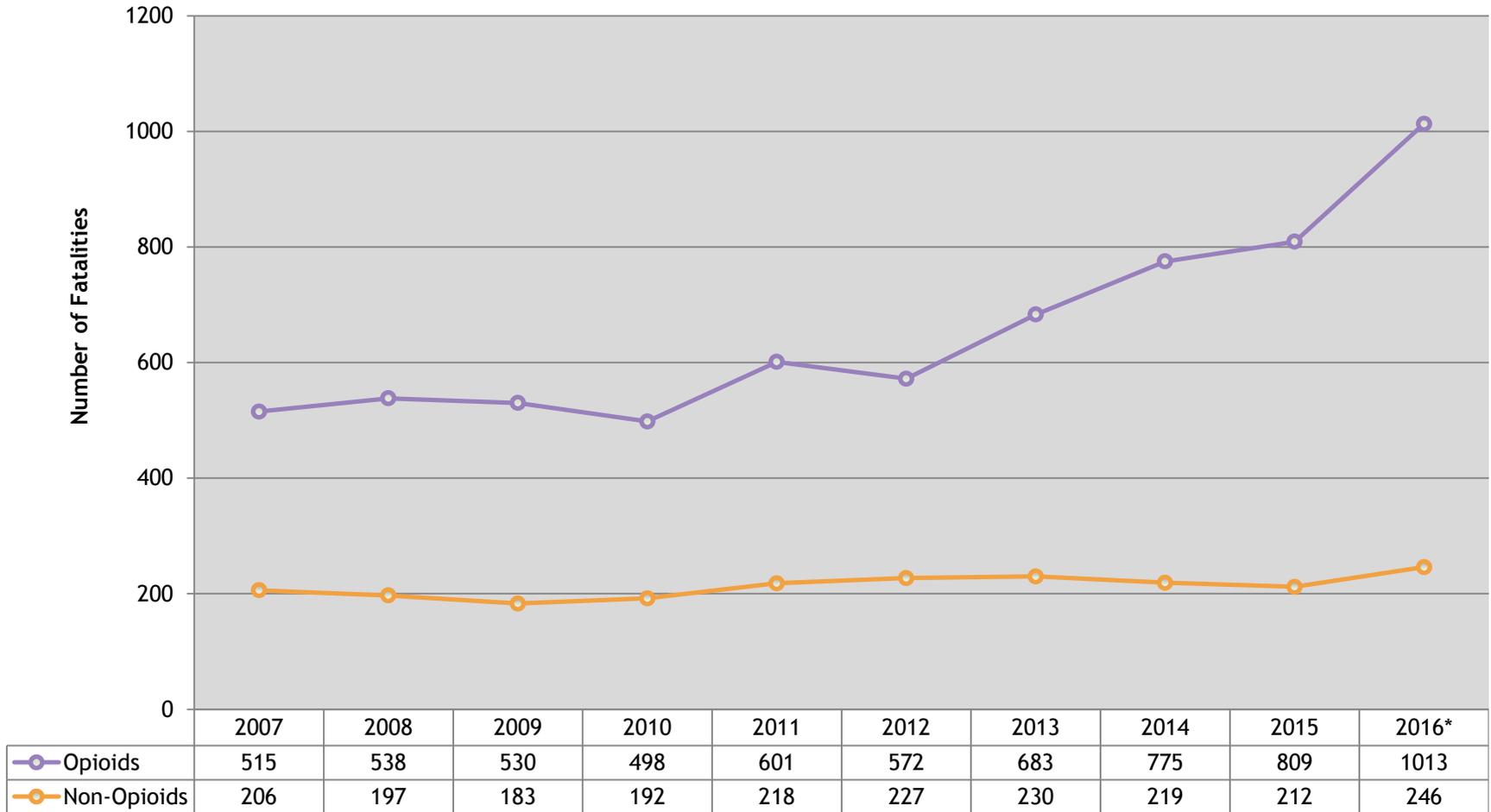


<sup>1</sup> 'All Opioids' include all versions of fentanyl, heroin, prescription opioids, and opioids unspecified

<sup>2</sup> 'Opioids Unspecified' are a small category of deaths in which the determination of heroin and/or one or more prescription opioids cannot be made due to specific circumstances of the death. Most commonly, these circumstances are a result of death several days after an overdose, in which the OCME cannot test for toxicology because the substances have been metabolized out of the decedent's system.

# OPIOIDS VS. NON-OPIOIDS

Total Number of Fatal Opioid Overdoses vs. Non-Opioid Overdoses by Year of Death, 2007-2016  
(Data for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



<sup>1</sup> 'All Opioids' include all versions of fentanyl, heroin, prescription opioids, and opioids unspecified

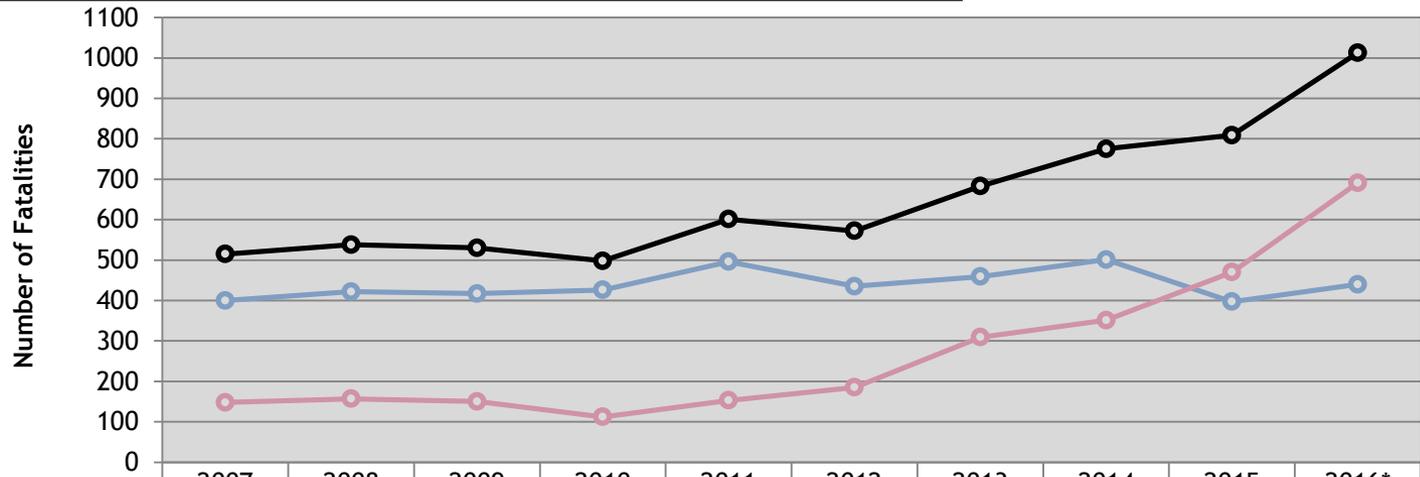
<sup>2</sup> 'Opioids Unspecified' are a small category of deaths in which the determination of heroin and/or one or more prescription opioids cannot be made due to specific circumstances of the death. Most commonly, these circumstances are a result of death several days after an overdose, in which the OCME cannot test for toxicology because the substances have been metabolized out of the decedent's system.

<sup>3</sup> Fatal opioid numbers have changed slightly from past reports due to the removal of fentanyl from the category of prescription opioids, as well as the addition of buprenorphine, levorphanol, meperidine, pentazocine, propoxyphene, and tapentadol added to the list of prescription opioids.

# OPIOIDS- A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Prescription opioids are drugs that are commercially made by pharmaceutical companies in certified laboratories that act upon the opioid receptors in the brain. Historically, fentanyl has been one of these drugs. However, in late 2013, early 2014, illicitly made fentanyl began showing up in Virginia and by 2016, most fatal fentanyl overdoses were of illicit production of the drug. Separating fentanyl from the grouping of prescription opioids for this reason demonstrates a decrease in fatal prescription opioid overdoses in 2015 and a dramatic increase in the number of fatal fentanyl and/or heroin overdoses. This has caused the significant rise in all fatal opioid overdoses in the Commonwealth since 2012.

**Total Number of Prescription Opioid (excluding Fentanyl), Fentanyl and/or Heroin, and All Opioid Overdoses by Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
 ('Total Fatalities' for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



|   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| —●— All Opioids                               | 515 | 538 | 530 | 498 | 601 | 572 | 683 | 775 | 809 | 1013 |
| —●— Prescription Opioids (excluding fentanyl) | 400 | 422 | 417 | 426 | 496 | 435 | 459 | 501 | 397 | 440  |
| —●— Fentanyl and/or Heroin                    | 148 | 157 | 150 | 112 | 153 | 185 | 309 | 351 | 470 | 691  |

<sup>1</sup> 'All Opioids' include all versions of fentanyl, heroin, prescription opioids, and opioids unspecified

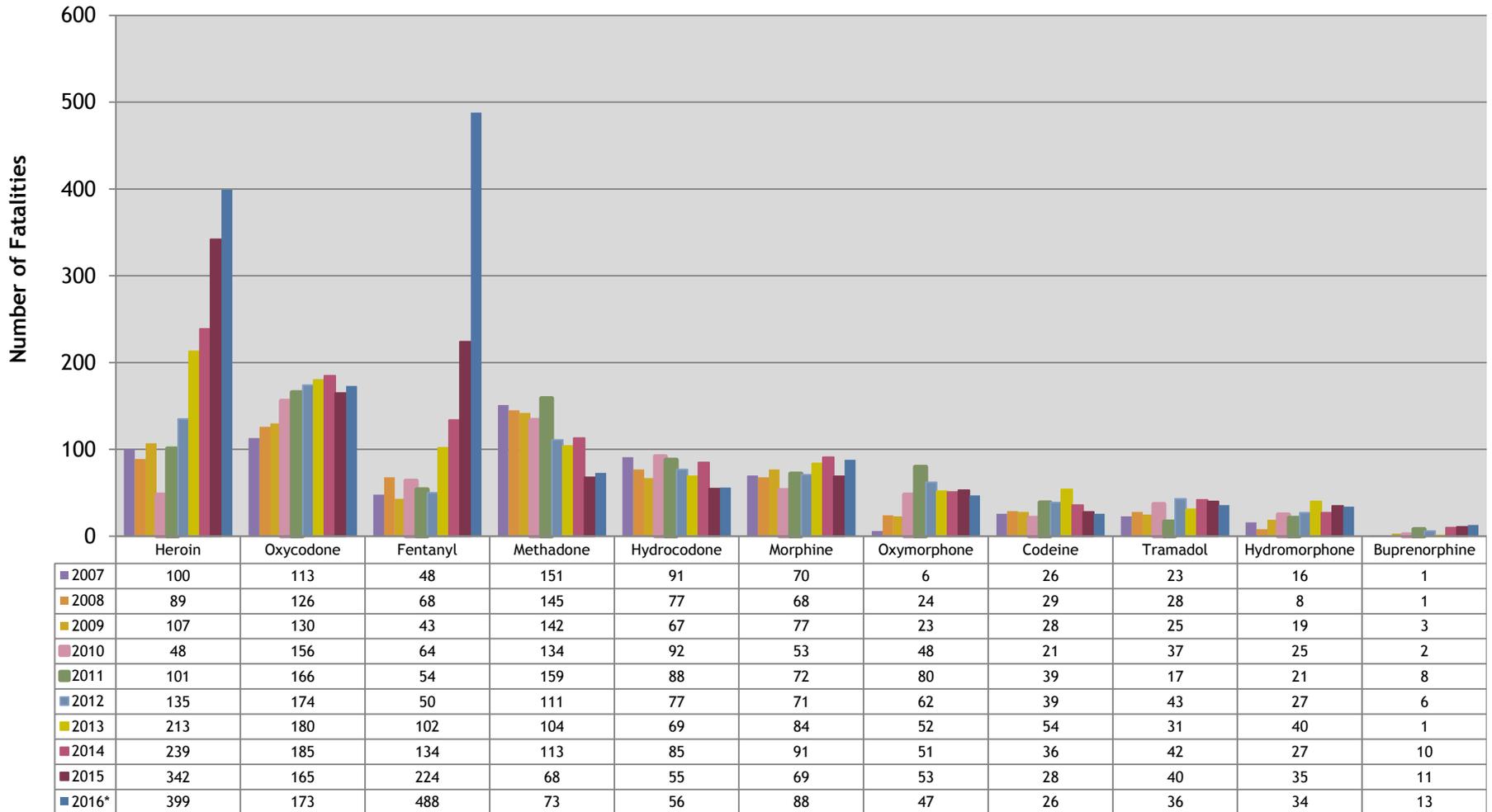
<sup>2</sup> Illicit and pharmaceutically produced fatal fentanyl overdoses are represented in this analysis. This includes all different types of fentanyl analogs (acetyl fentanyl, furanyl fentanyl, etc.)

<sup>3</sup> 'Prescription Opioids (excluding fentanyl)' calculates all deaths in which one or more prescription opioids caused or contributed to death, but excludes fentanyl from the **required list** of prescription opioid drugs used to calculate the numbers. However, given that some of these deaths have multiple drugs on board, some deaths may have fentanyl in addition to other prescriptions opioids, and are therefore counted in the total number. Analysis must be done this way because by excluding all deaths in which fentanyl caused or contributed to death, the calculation would also exclude other prescription opioid deaths (oxycodone, methadone, etc.) from the analysis and would thereby undercount the actual number of fatalities due to these true prescription opioids.

<sup>4</sup> Fatal opioid numbers have changed slightly from past reports due to the removal of fentanyl from the category of prescription opioids, as well as the addition of buprenorphine, levorphanol, meperidine, pentazocine, propoxyphene, and tapentadol added to the list of prescription opioids.

# ALL OPIOIDS

Total Number of Fatal Opioid Overdoses by Drug Name and Year of Death, 2007-2016  
 (Data for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)

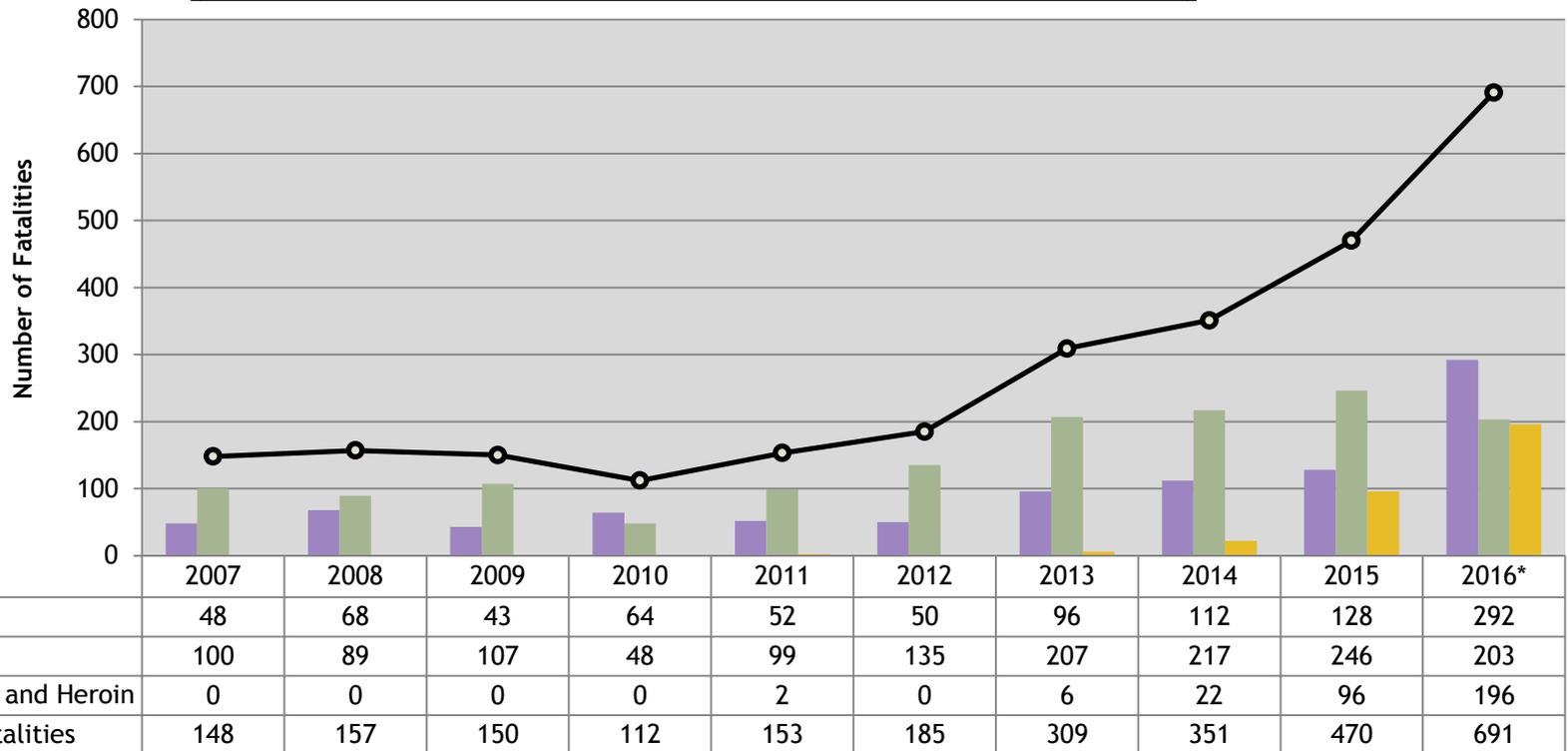


\* 1 Illicit and pharmaceutically produced fatal fentanyl overdoses are represented in this analysis. This includes all different types of fentanyl analogs (acetyl fentanyl, furanyl fentanyl, etc.)

# FENTANYL AND/OR HEROIN

The total number of fatal fentanyl and/or heroin overdoses have significantly increased since late 2012. It is important to look at these two drugs together because as heroin became more popular in 2010, fentanyl occasionally began showing up as an additive to the heroin. By late 2013 and early 2014, some heroin being sold on the street was actually completely fentanyl, unbeknownst to the user. It is essential to look at these fentanyl (no heroin), heroin (no fentanyl), and fentanyl and heroin combination deaths together because users never know exactly what is in the illegal drugs purchased off the streets.

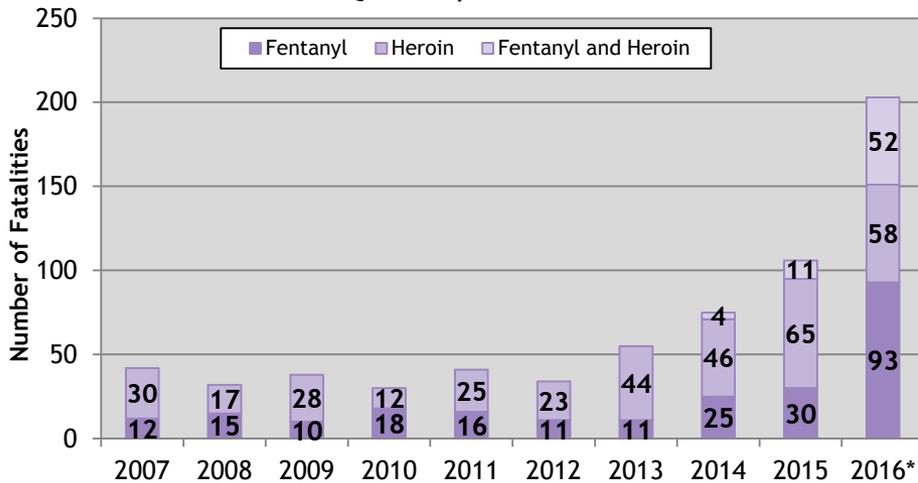
**Total Number of Fatal Fentanyl and/or Heroin Overdoses by Year of Death, 2007-2016**  
(‘Total Fatalities’ for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



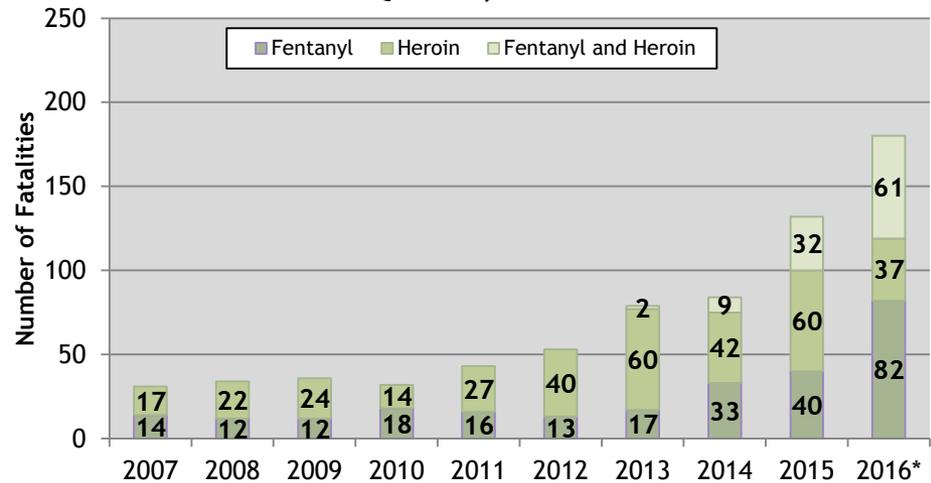
<sup>1</sup> Illicit and pharmaceutically produced fatal fentanyl overdoses are represented in this analysis. This includes all different types of fentanyl analogs (acetyl fentanyl, furanyl fentanyl, etc.)

# FENTANYL AND/OR HEROIN

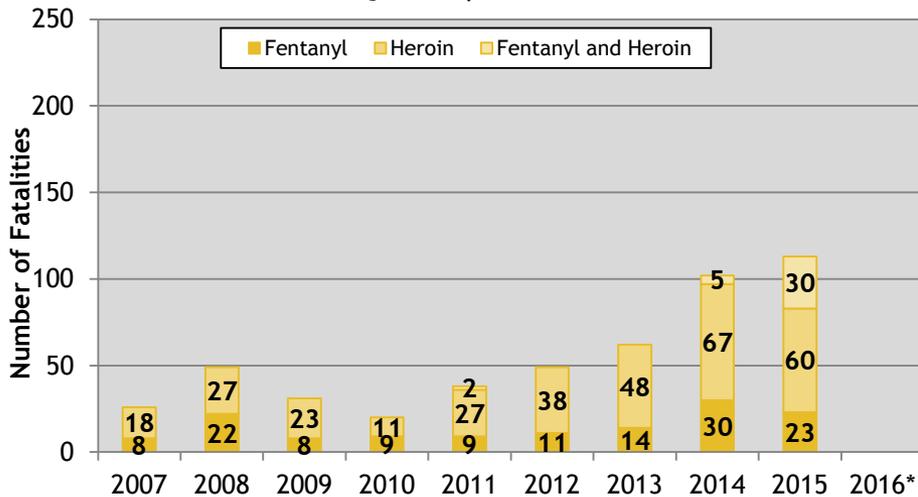
## First Quarter, 2007-2016



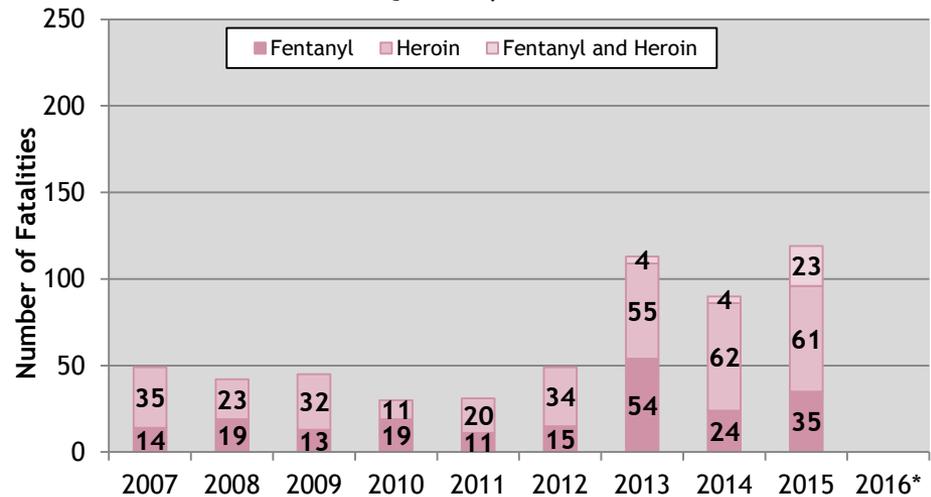
## Second Quarter, 2007-2016



## Third Quarter, 2007-2016

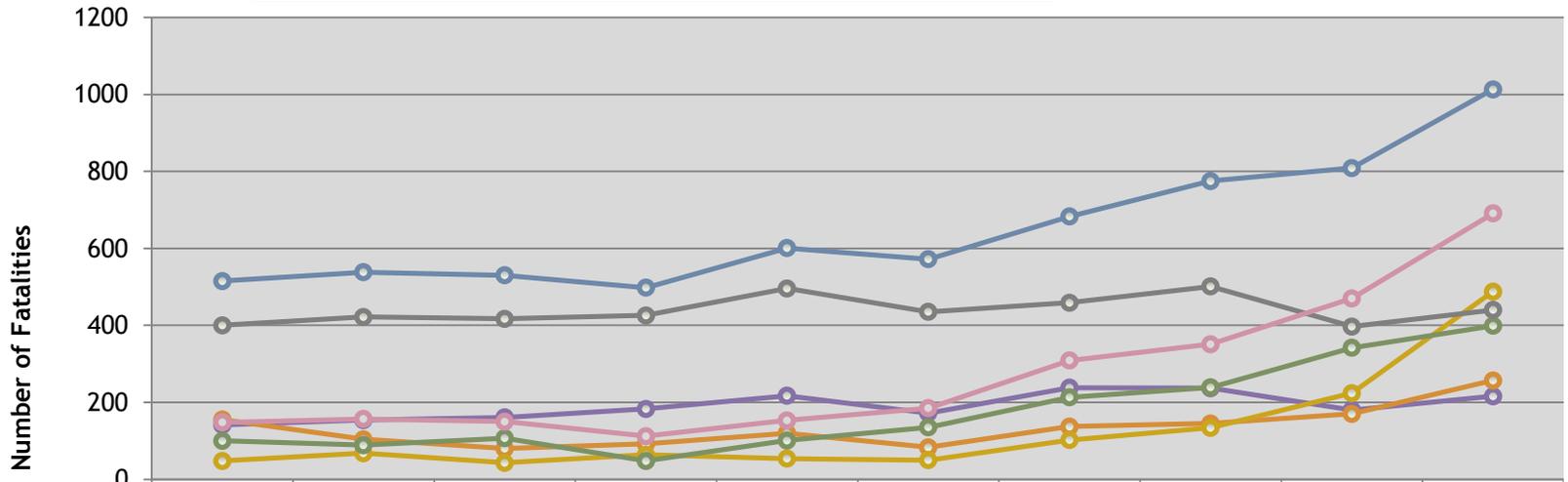


## Fourth Quarter, 2007-2016



# ALL DRUGS

Total Number of Fatal Drug Overdoses Drug Name/Category and Year of Death, 2007-2016  
(Data for 2016 is a Predicted Total for the Entire Year)



|   | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016* |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| — Benzodiazepines                           | 141  | 154  | 161  | 183  | 217  | 172  | 238  | 237  | 180  | 216   |
| — Cocaine                                   | 155  | 104  | 80   | 92   | 120  | 83   | 137  | 145  | 170  | 257   |
| — Fentanyl                                  | 48   | 68   | 43   | 64   | 54   | 50   | 102  | 134  | 224  | 488   |
| — Heroin                                    | 100  | 89   | 107  | 48   | 101  | 135  | 213  | 239  | 342  | 399   |
| — Prescription Opioids (excluding Fentanyl) | 400  | 422  | 417  | 426  | 496  | 435  | 459  | 501  | 397  | 440   |
| — All Opioids                               | 515  | 538  | 530  | 498  | 601  | 572  | 683  | 775  | 809  | 1013  |
| — Heroin and/or Fentanyl                    | 148  | 157  | 150  | 112  | 153  | 185  | 309  | 351  | 470  | 691   |

<sup>1</sup> Deaths may be represented in more than one category due to groupings of drug categories (e.g. heroin)

<sup>2</sup> 'All Opioids' include heroin, prescription opioids, and opioids unspecified

<sup>3</sup> 'Opioids Unspecified' are a small category of deaths in which the determination of heroin and/or one or more prescription opioids cannot be made due to specific circumstances of the death. Most commonly, these circumstances are a result of death several days after an overdose, in which the OCME cannot test for toxicology because the substances have been metabolized out of the decedent's system.

<sup>4</sup> Historically, fentanyl has been categorized as a prescription opioid because it is mass produced by pharmaceutical companies. However, recent law enforcement investigations and toxicology results have demonstrated that several recent fentanyl seizures have **not** been pharmaceutically produced, but illicitly produced. This illicit form of fentanyl is produced by international drug traffickers who import the drug into the United States and often, mix it into heroin being sold. This illicitly produced fentanyl, especially fentanyl mixed with heroin, has been the biggest contributor to the significant increase in the number of fatal opioid overdoses in Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> Illicit and pharmaceutically produced fatal fentanyl overdoses are represented in this analysis. This includes all different types of fentanyl analogs (acetyl fentanyl, furanyl fentanyl, etc.)

<sup>6</sup> Fatal opioid numbers have changed slightly from past reports due to the removal of fentanyl from the category of prescription opioids, as well as the addition of buprenorphine, levorphanol, meperidine, pentazocine, propoxyphene, and tapentadol added to the list of prescription opioids.

# CONTACT INFORMATION

This report is compiled by the Virginia Department of Health, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. For additional information regarding these or other statistics, please contact:

*Kathrin "Rosie" Hobron, MPH*  
*Statewide Forensic Epidemiologist*  
*Virginia Department of Health*  
*Office of the Chief Medical Examiner*  
*804-786-6063*  
[kathrin.hobron@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:kathrin.hobron@vdh.virginia.gov)  
<http://www.vdh.state.va.us/medexam/>