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“Committed Service and
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For Immediate Release

**Chester County Coroner’s Office Mid-Year Report on Fatal Drug
Overdoses**

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The Chester County Coroner’s Office is releasing data on drug overdose deaths in Chester County from January 1, 2019 through June 30, 2019. A total of 65 people have been confirmed to have died of a drug overdose during this period, with 62 deaths determined to be accidental and 3 due to suicide. While this is slightly more than the 57 overdose deaths reported mid-way through 2018, the Coroner’s Office cautions that it is not possible to accurately predict a total for all of 2019.

In 2018, Pennsylvania had the third highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the country, but overall overdose deaths decreased last year. According to Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, Pennsylvania saw an 18.8% decrease in overdose deaths in 2018. Chester County was one of many counties contributing to that welcome decrease. The Coroner’s Office reported 112 accidental overdose deaths in 2018, a 22% drop from 2017.

The demographic profile of those who have died of an accidental drug overdose so far in 2019 is similar to that of previous years, with the affected population remaining predominantly male (77%), white (80%), and in the 25-44 year age range.

Toxicological tests show that fentanyl, a synthetic opioid found in almost 76% of our cases, continues to be the predominant drug responsible for overdose deaths in Chester County. No other substance comes close but most fatalities involve multiple drugs, both illicit and prescription. Heroin, the next most common drug, was present in 22.6% of Chester County cases. Acetyl fentanyl, another synthetic opioid, and xylazine, a large animal anesthetic, were both found in 19.4% of cases, always in combination with fentanyl. The Coroner’s Office issued a statement about xylazine when it first appeared in Chester County overdose deaths early this year. Ethanol (alcohol) and prescription benzodiazepines like alprazolam were found in 17.7% and 16.1% of cases, respectively. So far this year cocaine, amphetamine, and methamphetamine have been detected in less than 15% of drug deaths.

Drug	2019 YTD (N=62)
Fentanyl	75.8%
Heroin	22.6%
Acetyl fentanyl	19.4%
Xylazine	19.4%
Ethanol	17.7%
Benzodiazepines	16.1%

Chester County Coroner Dr. Christina VandePol stated “People in Chester County continue to die from drug overdoses largely due to the super-strong opioid fentanyl. This is not your prescription painkiller, it’s an illegal street drug often substituted for heroin. The 2018 drop in deaths is encouraging, but the recent up-tick shows we can’t relax prevention, law enforcement, or treatment approaches in an effort to bring an end to this epidemic.”

VandePol also noted “The number of drug deaths continues to challenge the resources of many coroner and medical examiner offices, including ours. Nevertheless, we remain committed to supporting law enforcement efforts, providing answers for families, and reporting accurate and current data by performing an autopsy and toxicology testing in suspected drug overdose deaths. We communicate information on these and other deaths on our website, and to many other agencies, including Chester County Drug and Alcohol Services, the District Attorney’s Office, the Chester County and PA Departments of Health, and <http://www.overdosefreepa.org>.”

Approved for Release

Christina VandePol, M.D.