

Prescription Drug Misuse Trends Among Vermont Young Adults

Vermont has been working to reduce the misuse of prescription medications, particularly prescription opioids, as part of the state’s public health response to the opioid crisis. Vermonters age 18-25 (or “young adults”) are more likely to have misused pain relievers in the past year than other age groups.ⁱ

Findings from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) show that past year pain reliever misuse among Vermonters aged 18 to 25 has decreased in recent years, but the most recent year such data are available is for 2017/2018 (combined). This brief report is based on more up-to-date findings from the 2020 Vermont Young Adult Survey (YAS), which has been conducted every two years since 2014 as part of the evaluation of the state’s Partnerships for Success grants and includes prescription drug misuse items not available at the state level from NSDUH.

KEY POINTS

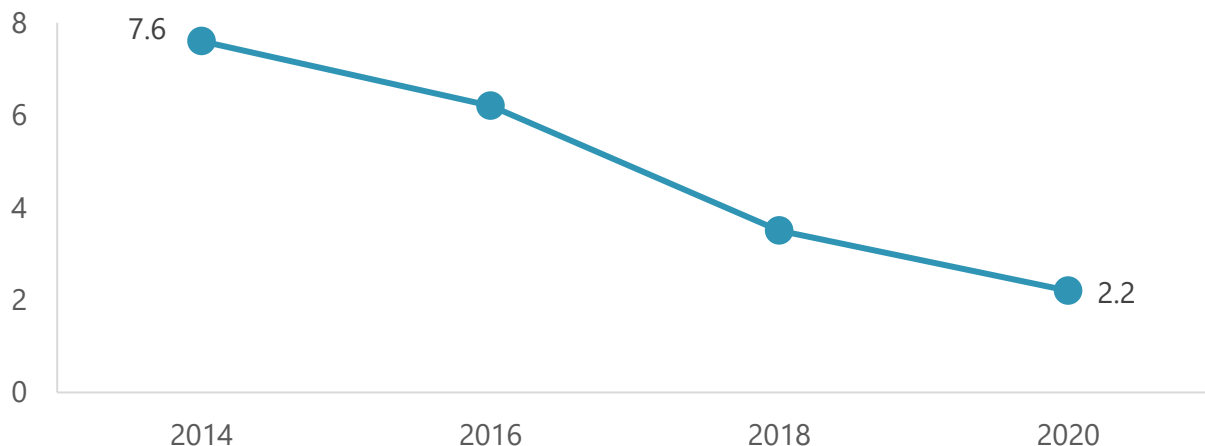
- **The misuse of prescription medications, including prescription pain relievers, by young adults in Vermont has been declining since 2014**
- **Related risk factors, such as perception of risk and availability of prescription pain relievers, have also been improving.**

Young Adult Misuse of Prescription Pain Relievers is Going Down

In response to the nation’s opioid misuse epidemic, progress has been made over the last several years, both nationally and for Vermont, in reducing rates of pain reliever misuse in the total population, including young adults specifically.

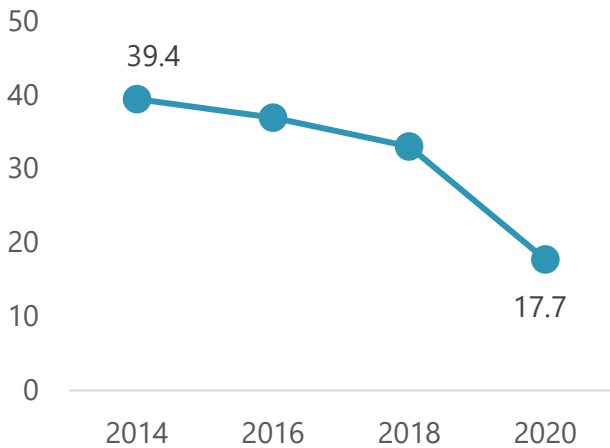
Results of the 2020 Vermont Young Adult Survey show a continuation of this trend.

The Percent of Vermont Residents Aged 18-25 Reporting Pain Reliever Misuse in the Past Year has declined significantly ($p < .05$) from 2014-2020

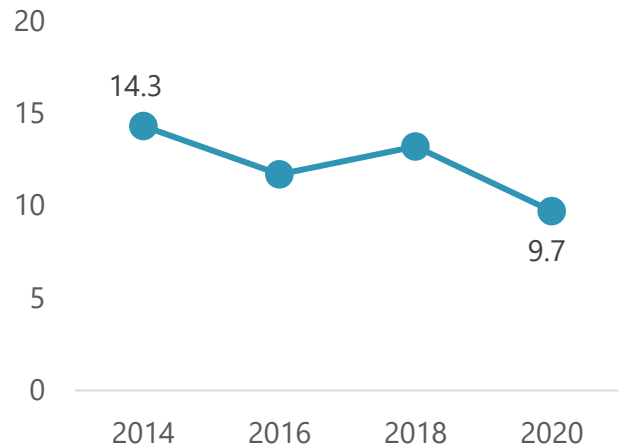


Rates for risk factors related to pain reliever misuse are also showing improvement, including reductions in the perception that prescription pain relievers are easy to get and that there is little or no risk from using prescription pain relievers without a prescription.

Fewer Young Adults Report That it is Easy or Very Easy for Persons Their Age to Get Prescription Pain Relievers Without a Prescription



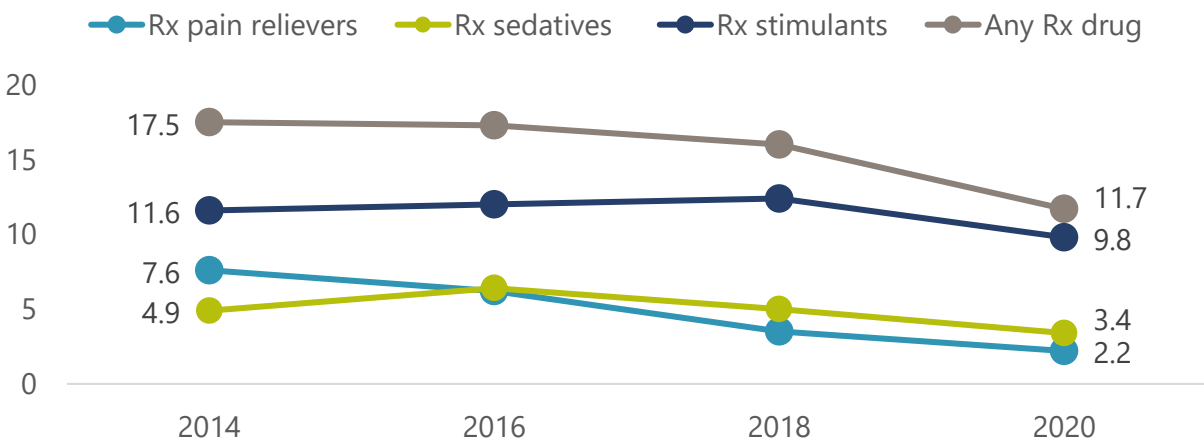
Fewer Young Adults Report No Risk or Slight Risk from Using Prescription Pain Relievers That Were Not Prescribed a Few Times a Year



Young Adult Misuse of Other Types of Prescriptions Medications is Also Declining

Past year misuse of prescription stimulants and sedatives among Vermont young adults has also been declining, although not as dramatically as for pain relievers.ⁱⁱ Prescription stimulants continues to be the medication type with highest levels of misuse in this age group. These downward trends are consistent across subgroups defined by sex and student status.

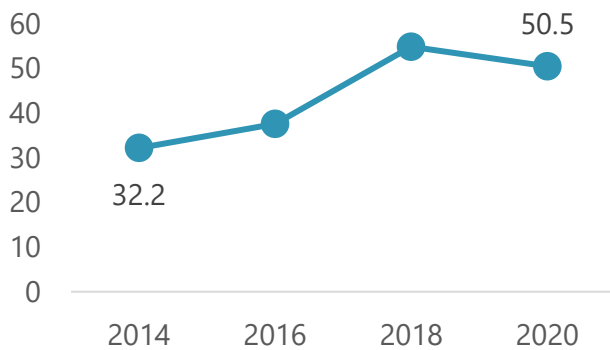
Past Year Misuse of Prescription Medications by Type (2014-2020)



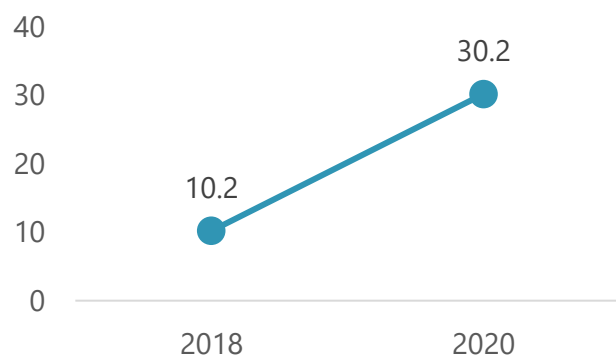
More young adults are reporting that they have seen messaging related to the prevention of prescription drug misuse

VDH has had several communications campaigns over the past several years related to the safe storage and disposal of prescription medications, as well as a campaign focused on young adults at increased risk of misusing prescription medications called "Over the Dose". There has been a notable increase in the percent of young adults reporting exposure to these messages over time.

More Young Adults Recall Seeing or Hearing Information About Safe Storage and Disposal of Prescription Medication



More Young Adults Recall Seeing or Hearing Information About "Over the Dose"



Key Takeaways

Encouraging trends showing reductions in the misuse of prescription medications among young adults over recent years continued strongly into 2020.

Changes to prescribing practices, messaging on dangers of misuse, safe storage and disposal, and efforts to limit availability have all likely contributed to these positive trends, along with many other prevention efforts and policies.ⁱⁱⁱ

This report was prepared for VDH by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) in conjunction with the evaluation of Regional Prevention Partnerships (RPP) project. Funding for RPP and its evaluation was provided by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Additional information about the Young Adult Survey is available on the VDH/ADAP website or by contacting Amy Livingston, PIRE, at alivingston@pire.org.

Past year pain reliever misuse by young adults in Vermont declined from 7.6% in 2014 to 2.2% in 2020

References

ⁱ SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2015- 2018.

ⁱⁱ Contrary to these findings, the most recent data from Vermont high school students obtained through the YRBS show a significant increase (from 2017 to 2019) in lifetime prescription pain reliever misuse and a non-significant increase in lifetime prescription stimulant misuse for the same time span.

ⁱⁱⁱ The COVID restrictions implemented in the spring may also have contributed to the decreased rates of misuse in 2020.