**Fiscal Facts: Troubling dip in Wisconsin life expectancy**

Life expectancy in Wisconsin has declined slightly for the second straight year amid rising death rates from suicide, alcohol, and opioid drugs — especially in Milwaukee County.

The life expectancy for individuals born in Wisconsin from 2015-17 was 80 years, down from 80.1 in 2014-16 and from 80.2 in 2013-15, according to the state Department of Health Services. Though slight, these consecutive decreases in the state mirror a national trend and mark a disturbing shift from the longstanding expectation that individuals could be expected to live as long or longer than those born before them.

Wisconsin residents still continue to have a longer life expectancy than the national average, which for 2017 was 78.6 years using a different methodology that does not allow for precise comparisons. Yet mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control show Wisconsin losing ground in some areas, including deaths due to alcohol and increased mortality rates among black residents and people in their 20s and 30s.

The state of Wisconsin does not evaluate whether its life expectancy data is statistically significant. But the trend in the state numbers matches a national life expectancy downturn, which is something not seen since the era of World War I and a global influenza epidemic a century ago.

In Wisconsin and nationally, the rate of death due to suicide, drugs, or alcohol has increased steadily since 1999. Drug and alcohol death rates in the state have more than tripled in that span. Total drug and alcohol deaths increased from 593 in 1999 to 1,985 in 2017, the most recent year for which data are available. The rate of increase in such deaths also accelerated over the last few years.

CDC data show the rate of alcohol-related deaths in Wisconsin, on par with the national average nearly two decades ago, is now higher. Such deaths include those for which the primary cause is alcohol, such as liver disease, alcohol poisoning, or fatal accidents in which the deceased person is intoxicated. In 2017, the state’s alcohol-related death rate rose more rapidly than the national rate to more than double what it was in 1999. That year the state had 356 alcohol deaths, which increased to 780 in 2017.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*