

What is the significance of the increase in drug-related deaths in Austria?

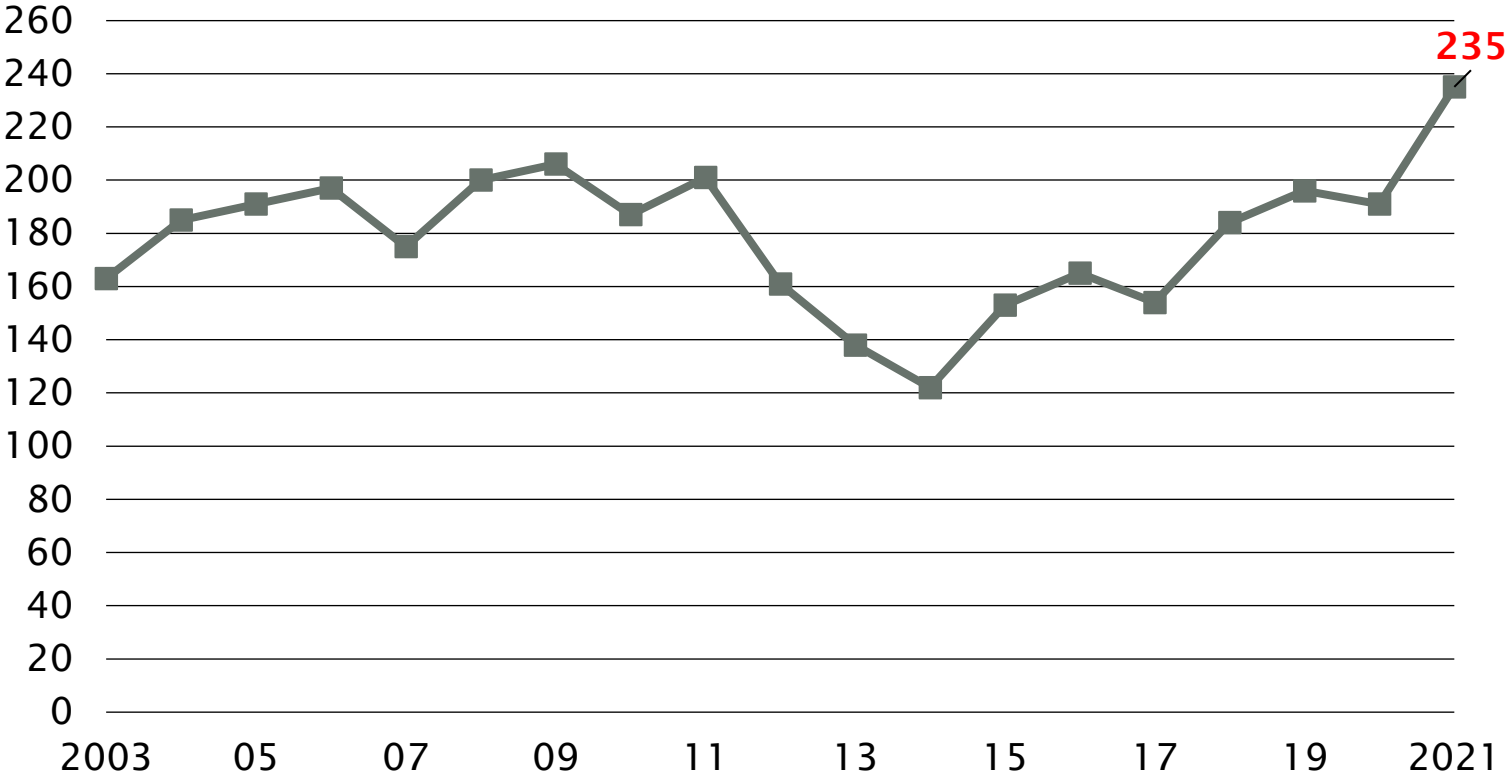
Martin Busch
20.4.2023

EMCDDA PDU online meeting 2023

Addiction Competence Centre of the Austrian National Public
Health Institute REITOX Focal Point Austria

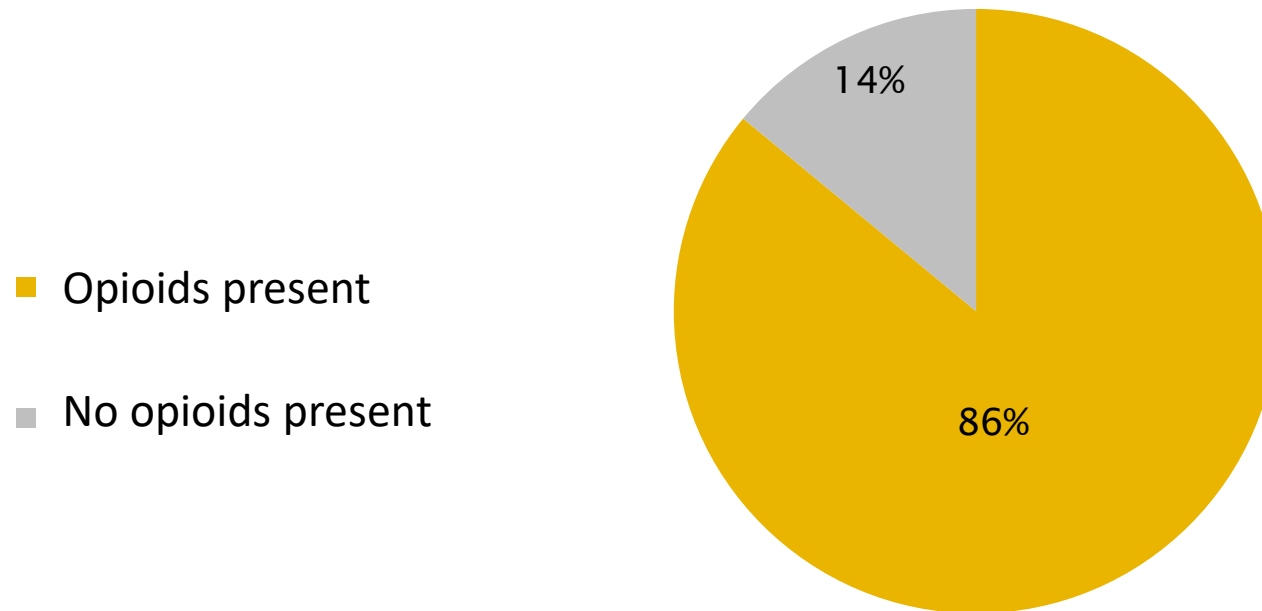
Gesundheit Österreich
GmbH 

Increase of drug related deaths in Austria



Source: Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022

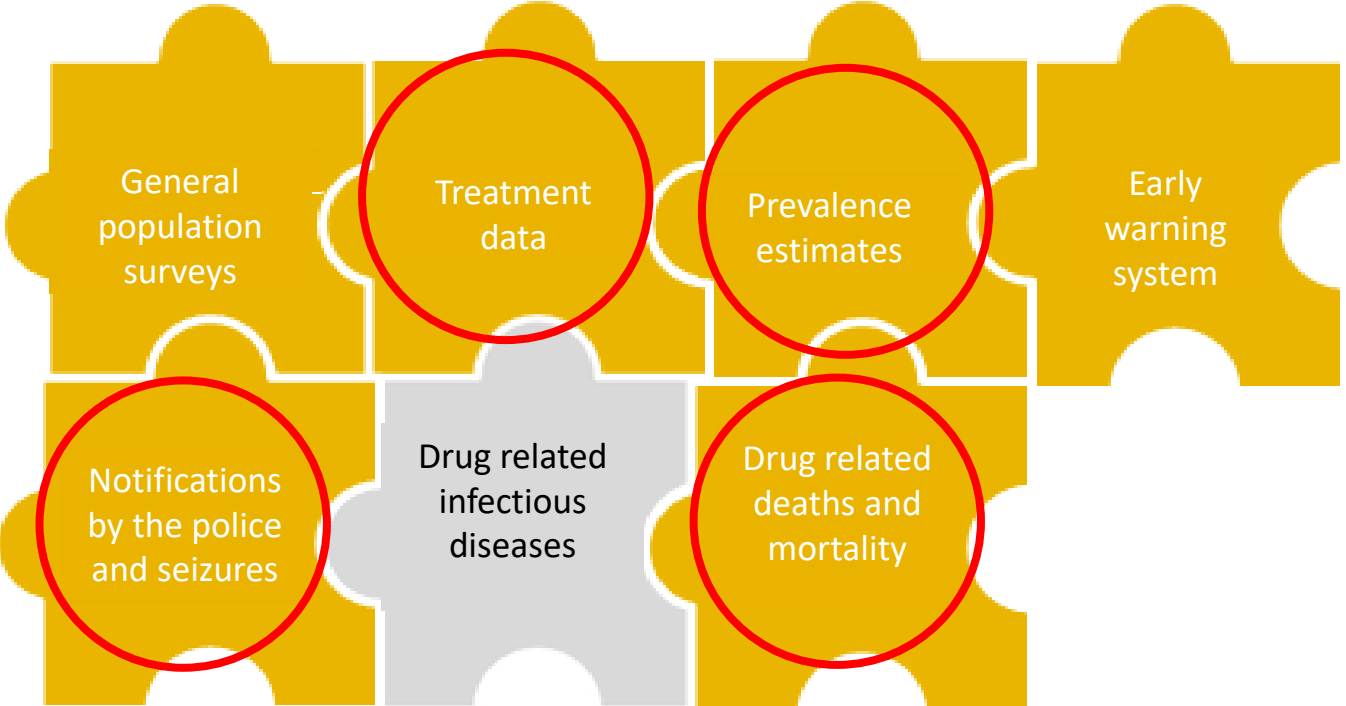
Involvement of opioids in directly drug-related deaths (overdoses) 2021



In 6 percent, opioids alone were detected, in 80 percent opioids in combination with other drugs, psychotropic drugs, NPS or alcohol. The percentages refer to 178 cases with toxicology out of a total of 235 directly drug-related deaths in 2021.

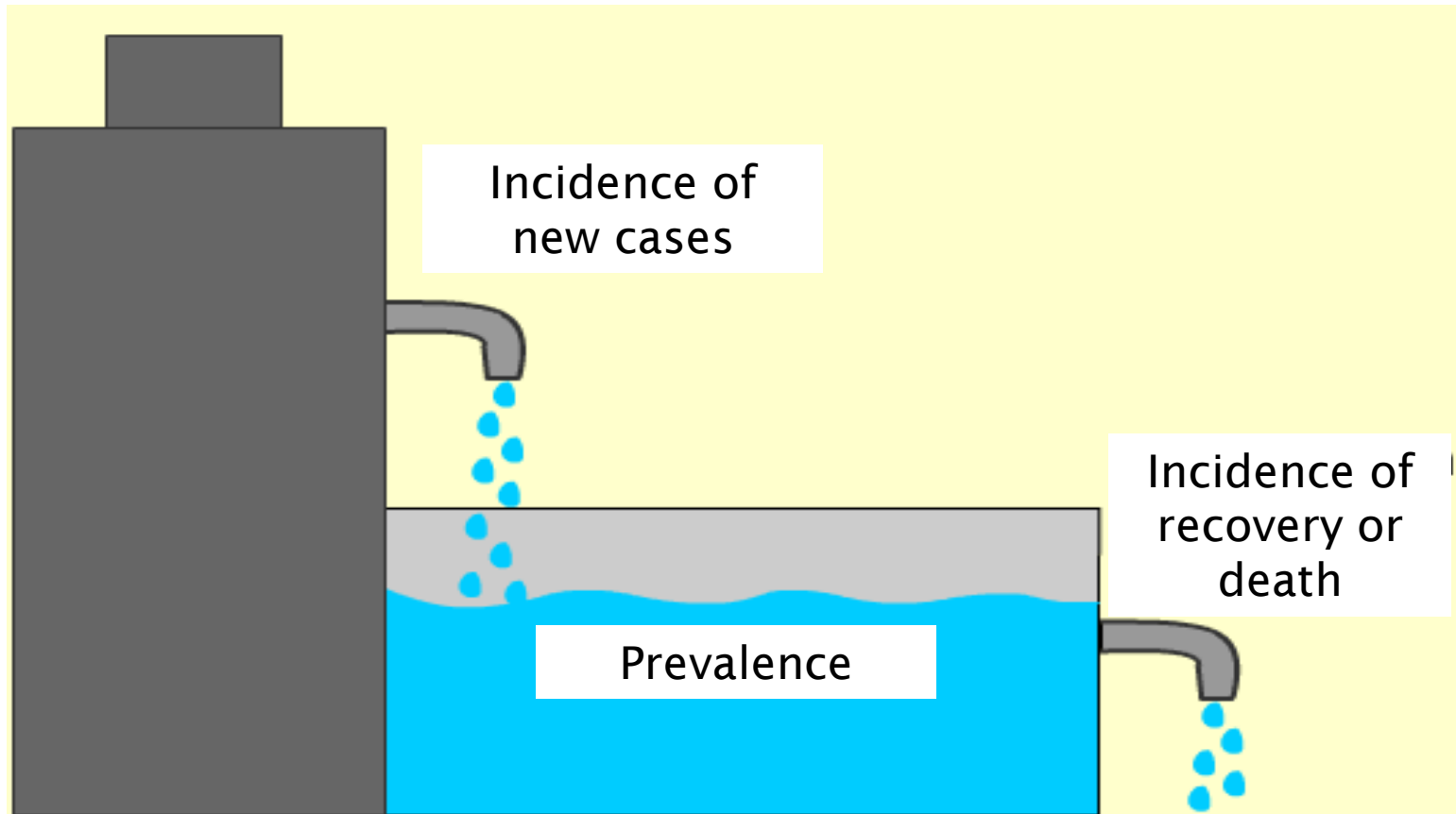
Source: Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022

Data available in the drug's field



- well implemented in Austria
- still a lot of work to do in Austria

The epidemiological fountain

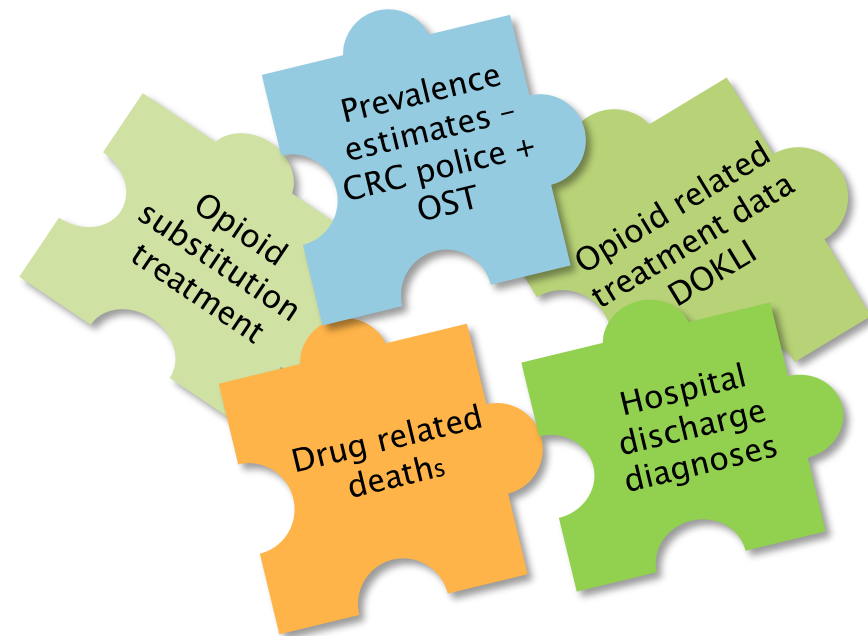


Putting together the puzzle

Cross indicator analysis

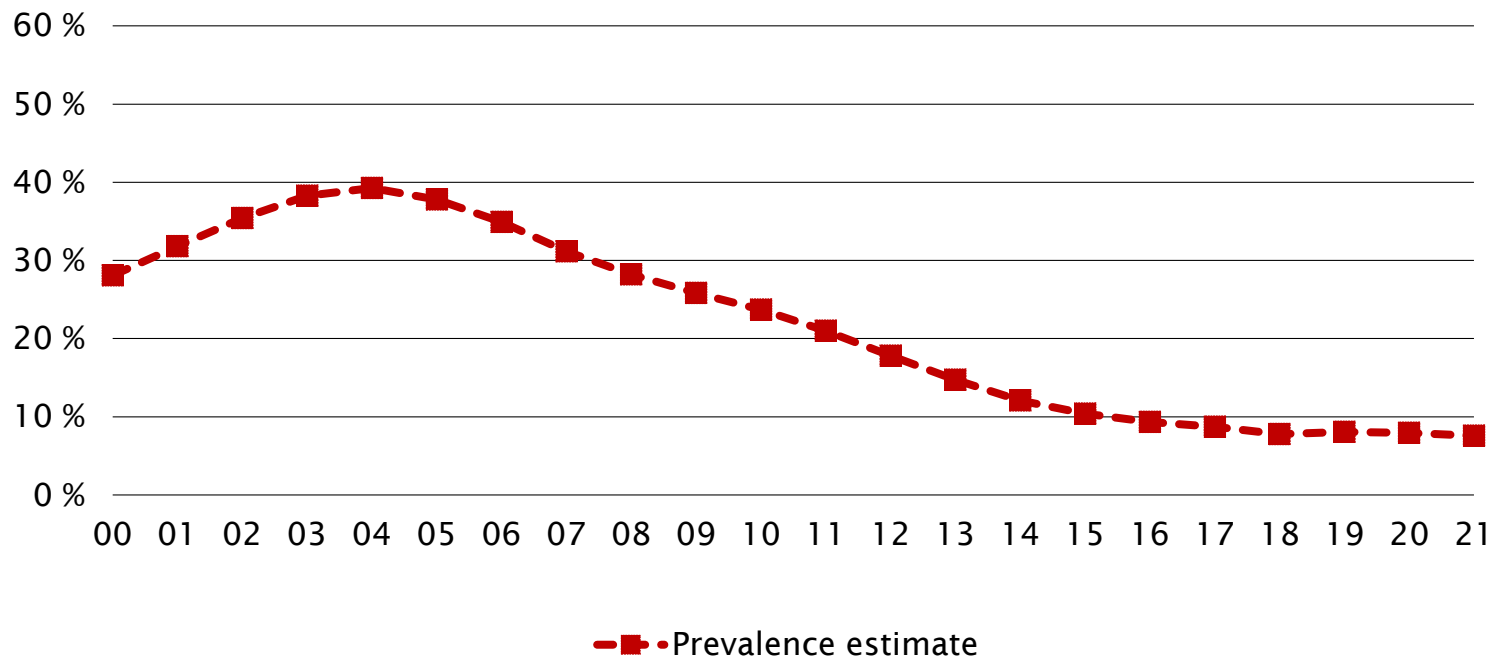
- Incidence of problematic drug use happens mostly in younger age (< 25 years).
- The percentage of this age group in the indicators is a good indicator for incidence of problem drug use.

What is available for the question of incidence?



Putting together the puzzle

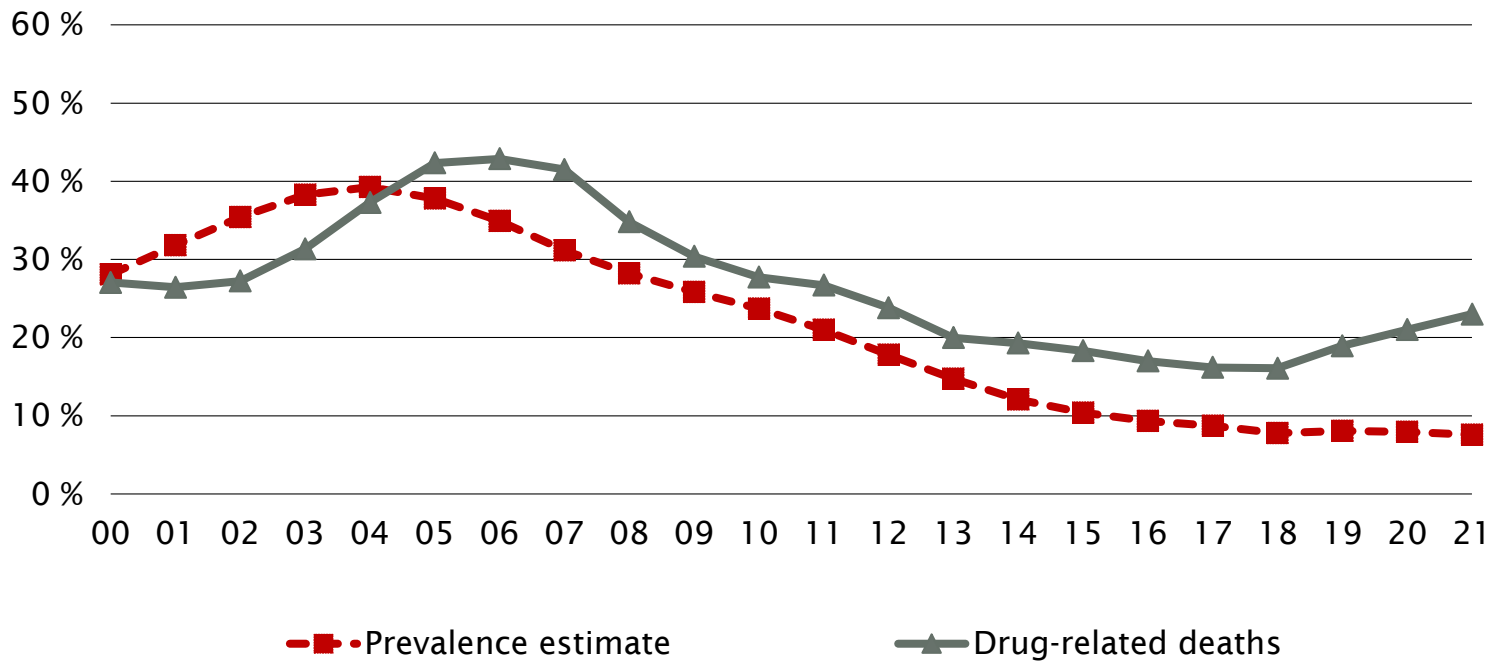
Percentage of people aged < 25



Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

Putting together the puzzle

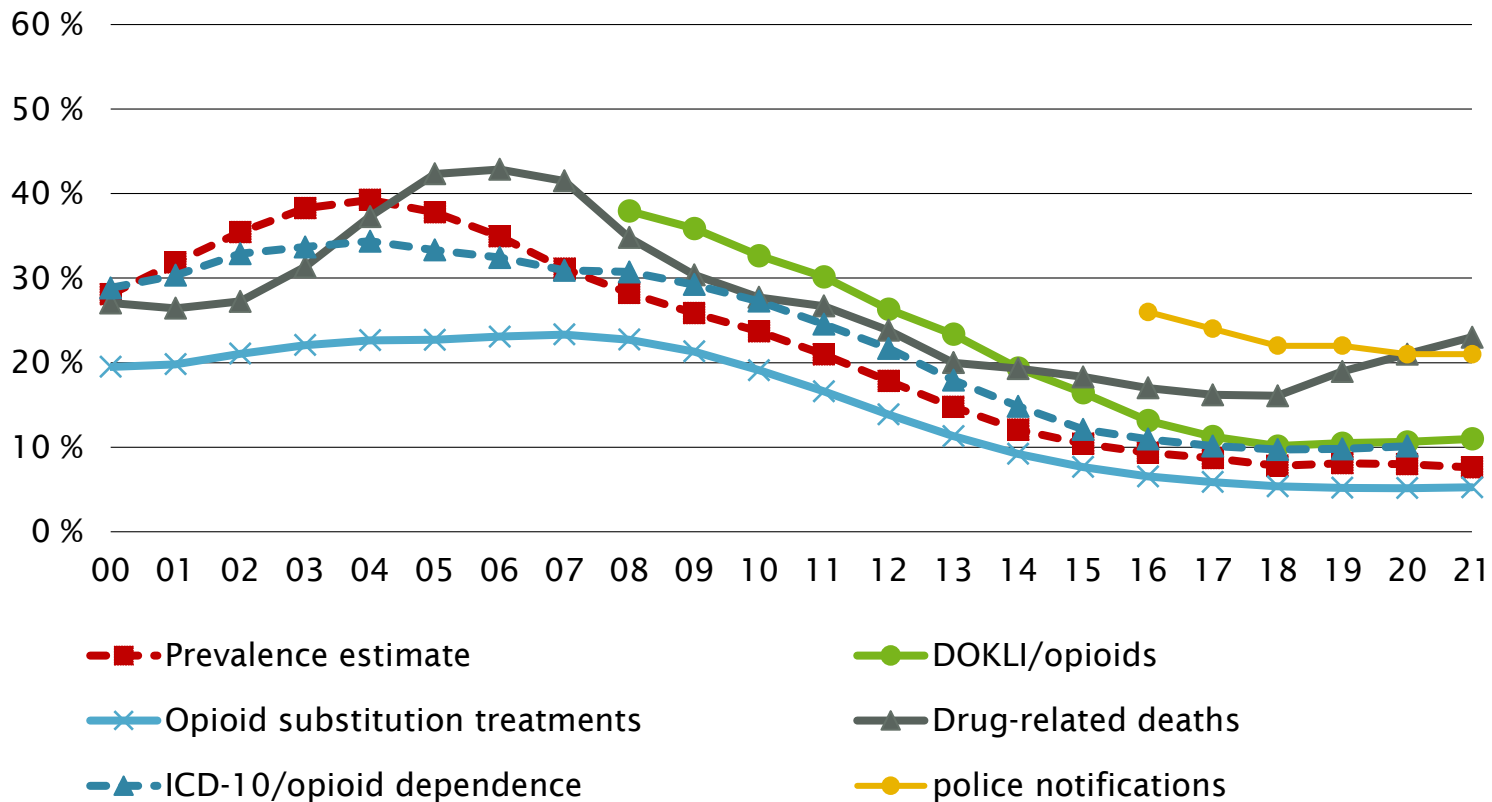
Percentage of people aged < 25



Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

Putting together the puzzle

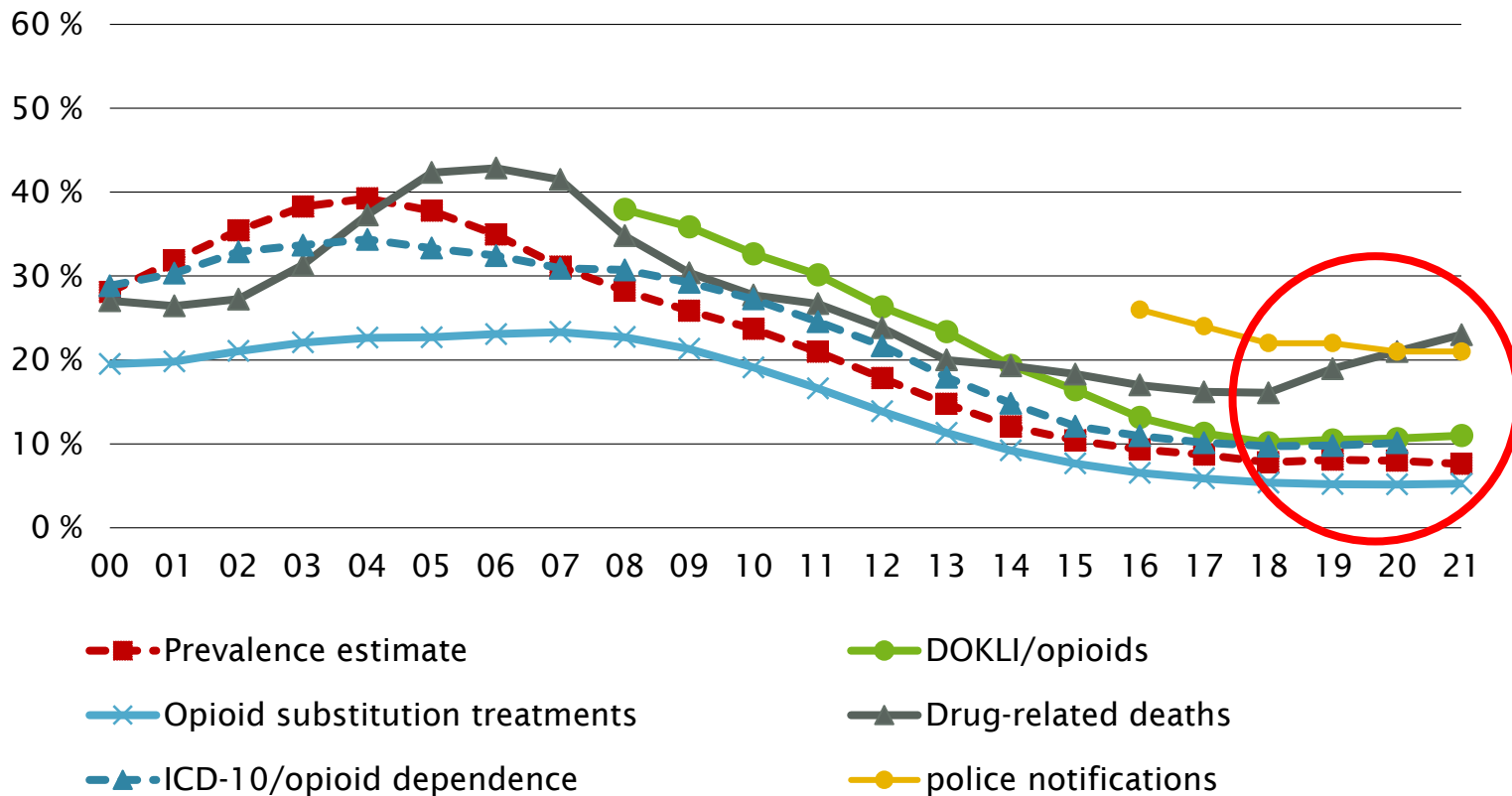
Percentage of people aged < 25



Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

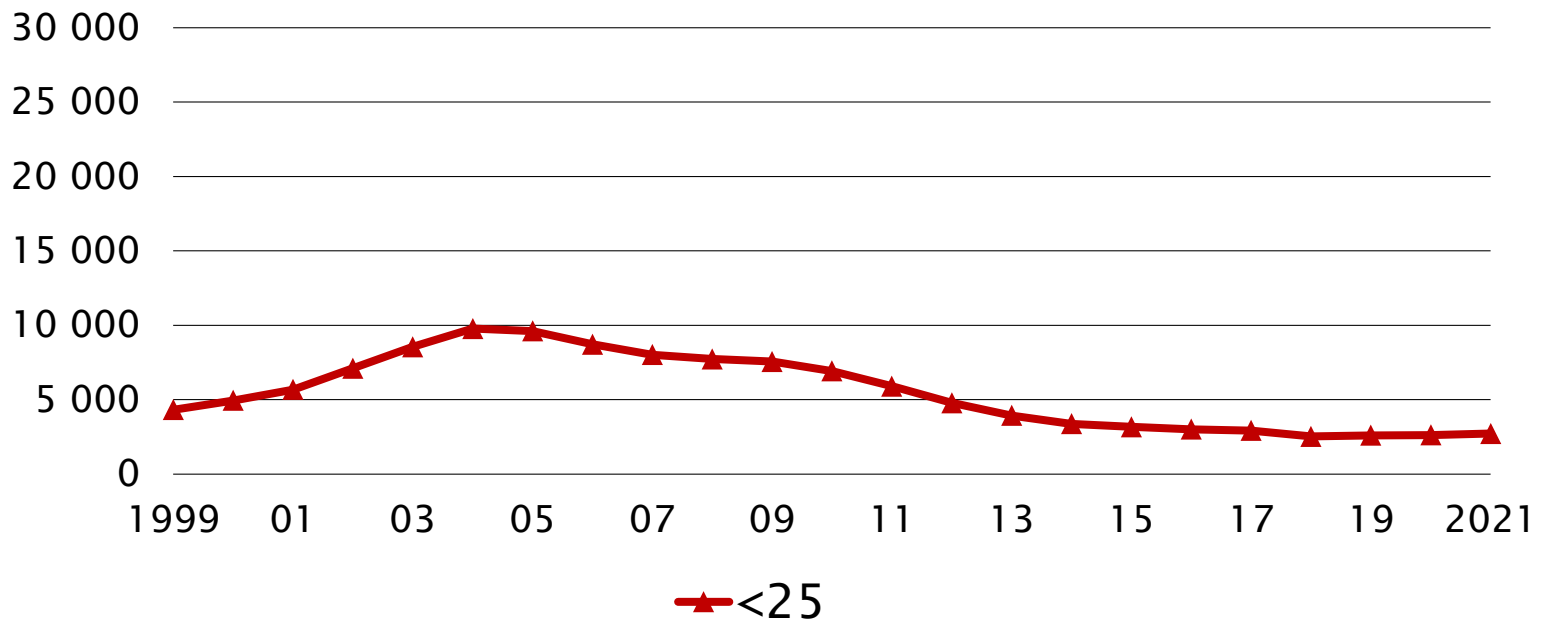
Putting together the puzzle

Percentage of people aged < 25



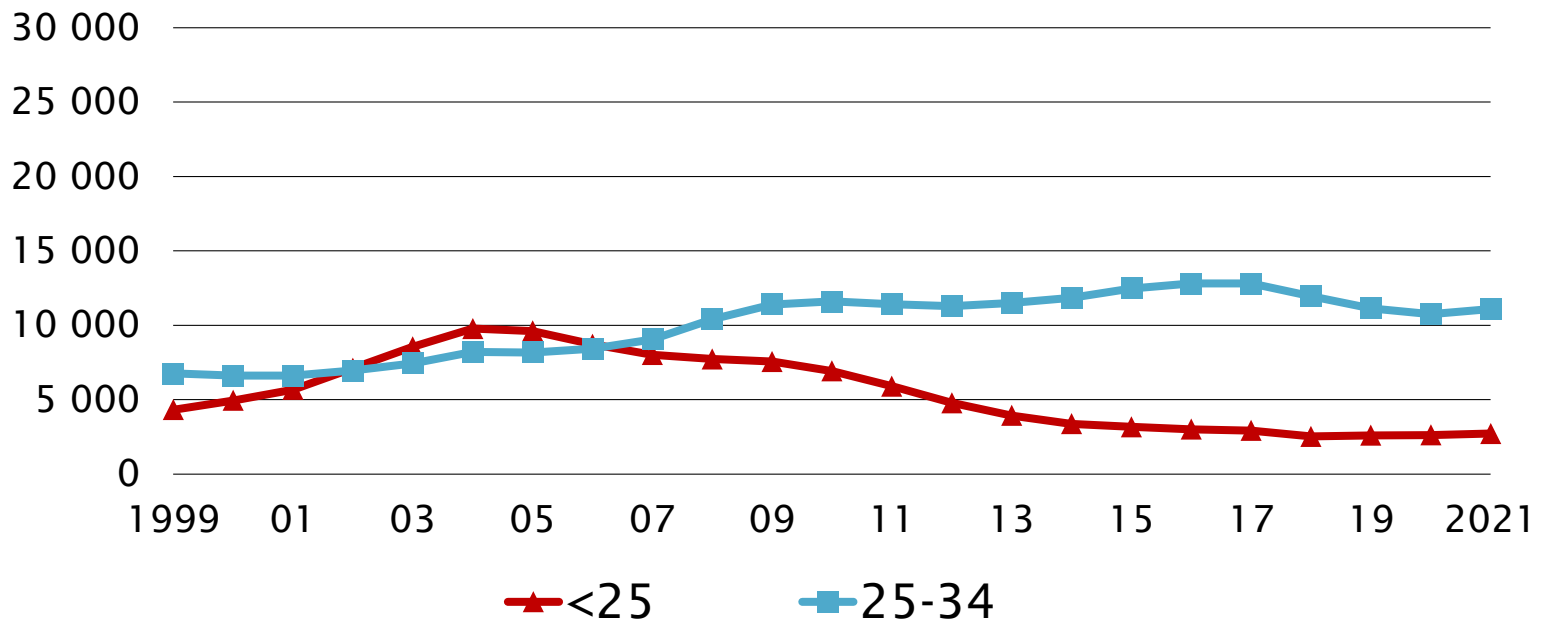
Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

Prevalence estimates stratified by age



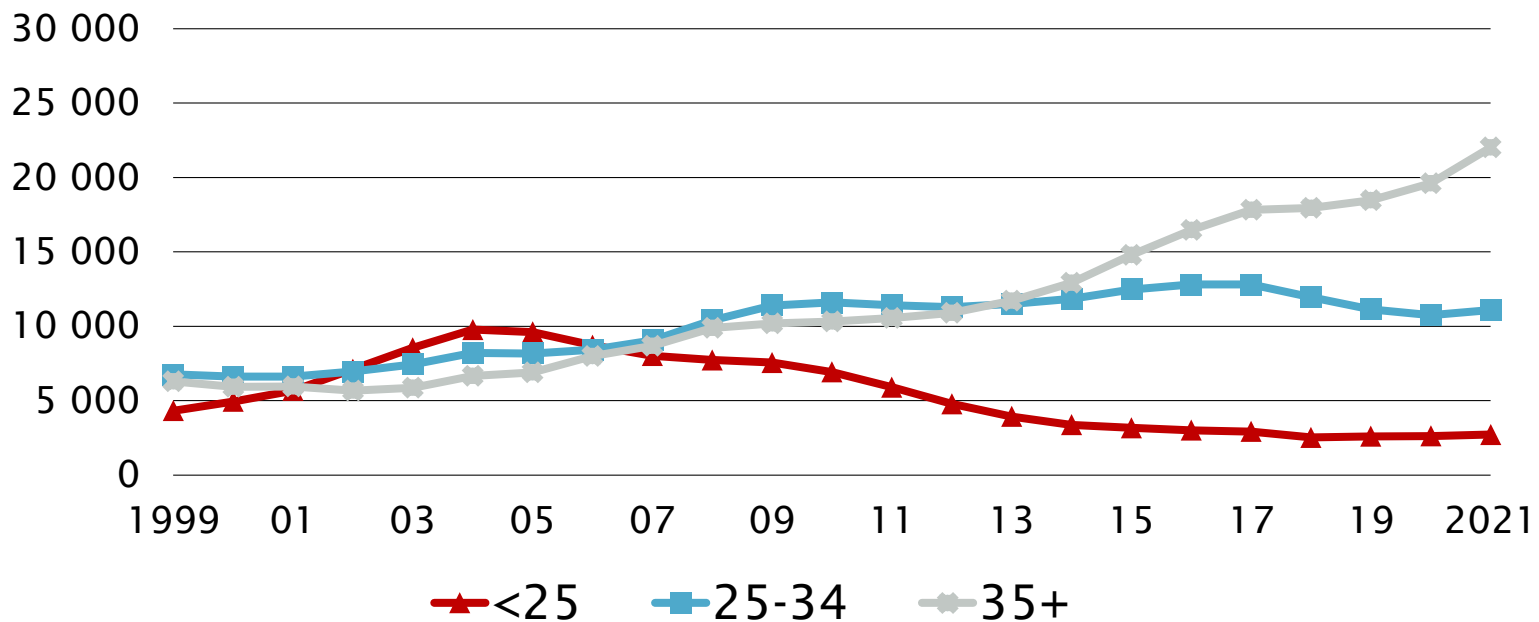
Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

Prevalence estimates stratified by age



Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

Prevalence estimates stratified by age

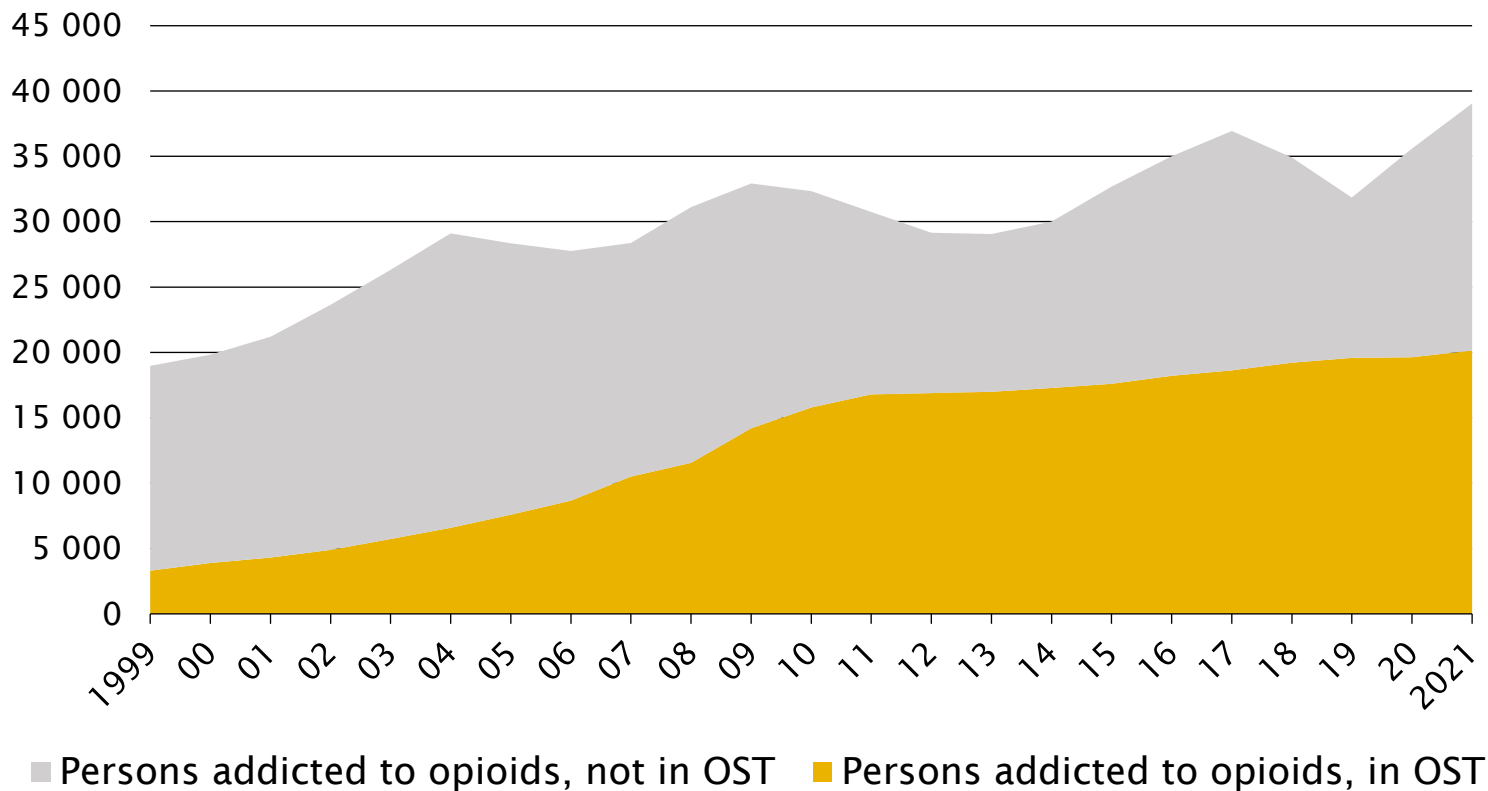


Opioid dependence is in most cases a chronic disease that lasts for many years. In contrast to the past, opioid addicts in Austria survive for a long time ("ageing" cohort). One reason for this is that, in contrast to 20 years ago, there is a much better care and treatment system.

Source: Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022

Putting together the puzzle

In-treatment rate



Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

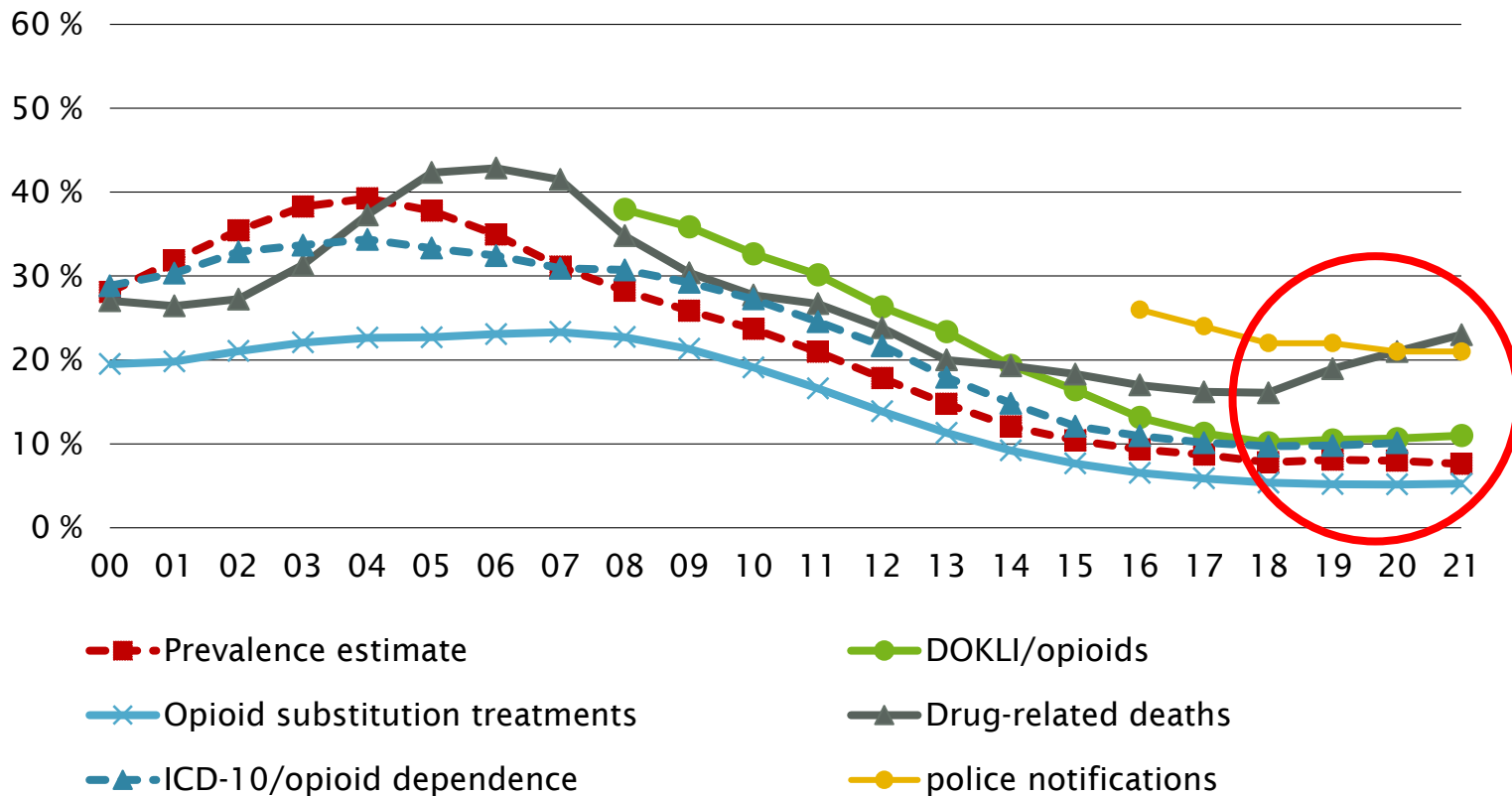
We know a lot about the actual drug situation in Austria!

- If the pieces fit together, each piece of the puzzle validates the others.
- If the pieces do not fit together, we have to ask and discuss “why?”



Putting together the puzzle

Percentage of people aged < 25



Source: *Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022*

Drug addiction and COVID-19

- The medium- to long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on high-risk drug use or on persons with drug problems cannot yet be estimated.
- The additional stresses caused by the pandemic (fears, loneliness) are likely to lead to an increase in psychiatric comorbidity among addicts, which is already observed in some facilities.
- Missed opportunities to start addiction treatment and the failure of many addiction prevention measures are further factors that make an aggravation of the situation in the field of drug addiction and an increased demand for treatment after the pandemic plausible.

Quelle: Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2022

Conclusions

- Compared to the mid-2000s, considerably fewer young people get into opioid use.
- Despite the increase in drug-related deaths, it can (still) be assumed that the drug situation is stable
- The increase in drug-related deaths and especially the increase in the share of persons < 25 years does not fit with the other indicators
- 3 possible interpretations:
 - First sign of a worsening of the drug situation
 - Consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - A mixture of both

Measures to reduce drug-related mortality

- Provide psychosocial support to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and respond to the increased need for post-pandemic treatment.
- Increasing the in-treatment rate of opioid substitution treatment (OST)
 - Simplification of bureaucratic processes within the framework of OST
 - Reaching new target groups - e.g. other forms of intake (injecting)
- Peer naloxone programmes (currently exist in Styria, Vienna and Burgenland)
 - Focus on risky situations (e.g., treatment discontinuation, release from prison)
- Drug checking (currently available in Vienna, Tyrol and Styria)

Questions for Discussion

- What do you think about this kind of cross-indicator analysis (e.g. comparing the percentage < 25 years in several sources of data as indicator for incidence)
- Do you think this would make sense for your country?
- Do you think this would make sense on EU-level?



Many thanks for your
attention!

Read more:

Epidemiologiebericht Sucht 2021 DOWNLOAD: <https://jasmin.goeg.at/1925/>

Bericht zur Drogensituation 2021 DOWNLOAD <https://jasmin.goeg.at/1926/>