



**More than 20 million people in the United States have a substance use disorder. Now, COVID-19 has left many locked down, laid off, and flooded with uncertainty. So far, experts see signs of relapses, rising overdoses, and other worries.**

**What can be done?**

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*According to UW Health  
Addiction experts...*

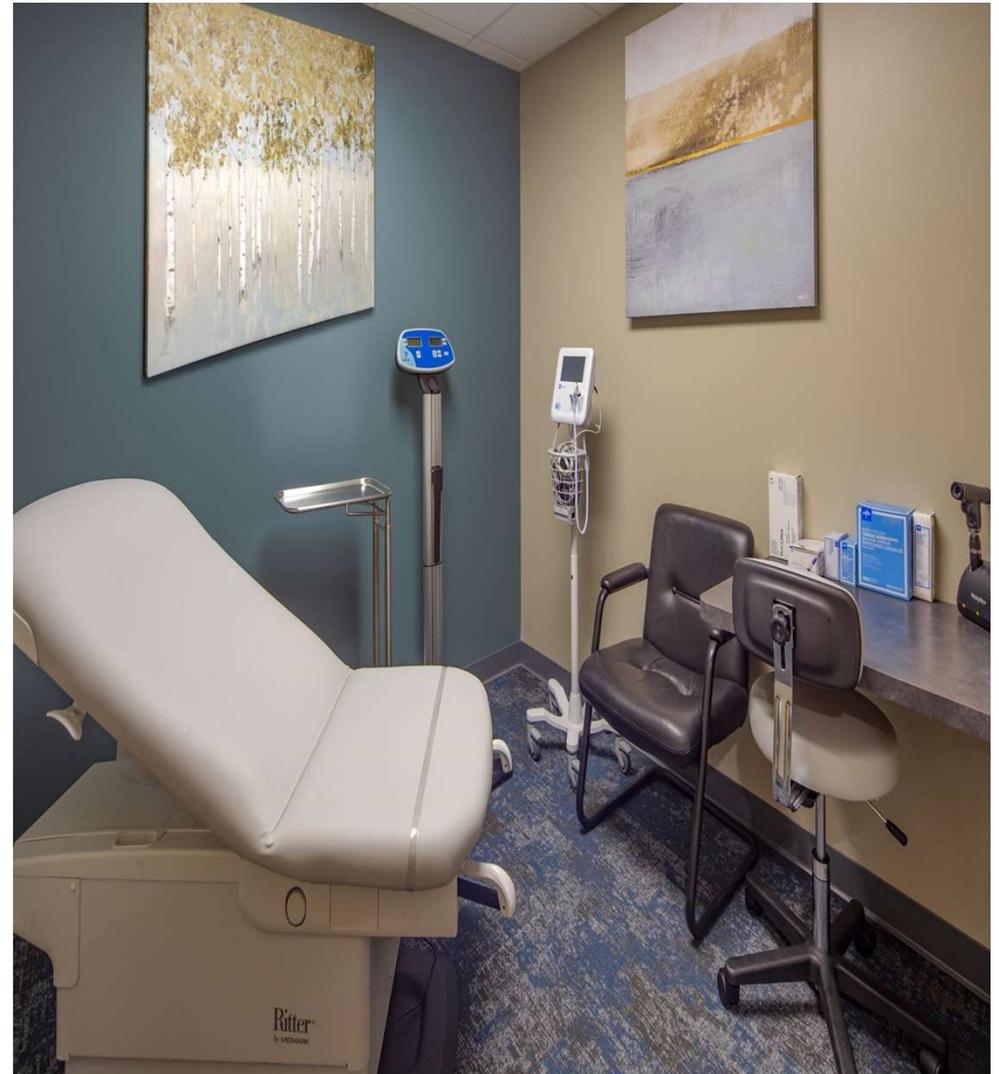
In recent months there has been a 37.9 percent increase in ambulance calls for people with substance-related emergencies compared to the same time frame in 2019. This can stem from....

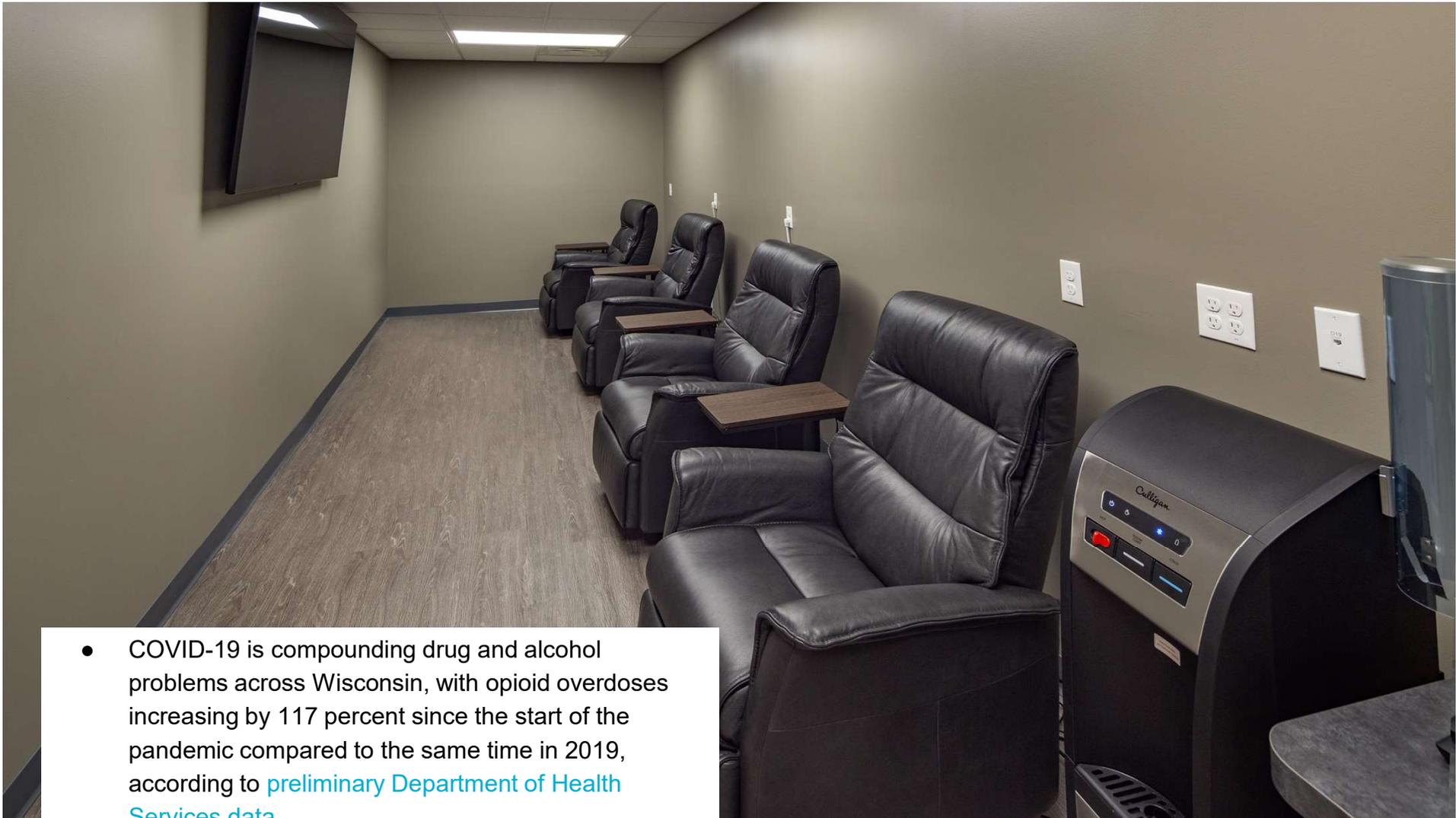
Photo credit: Kraus-Anderson

...challenges managing addictions due to disruptions in professional help or in-person peer support activities such as Alcoholics Anonymous groups, or simply due to increased stress and isolation.

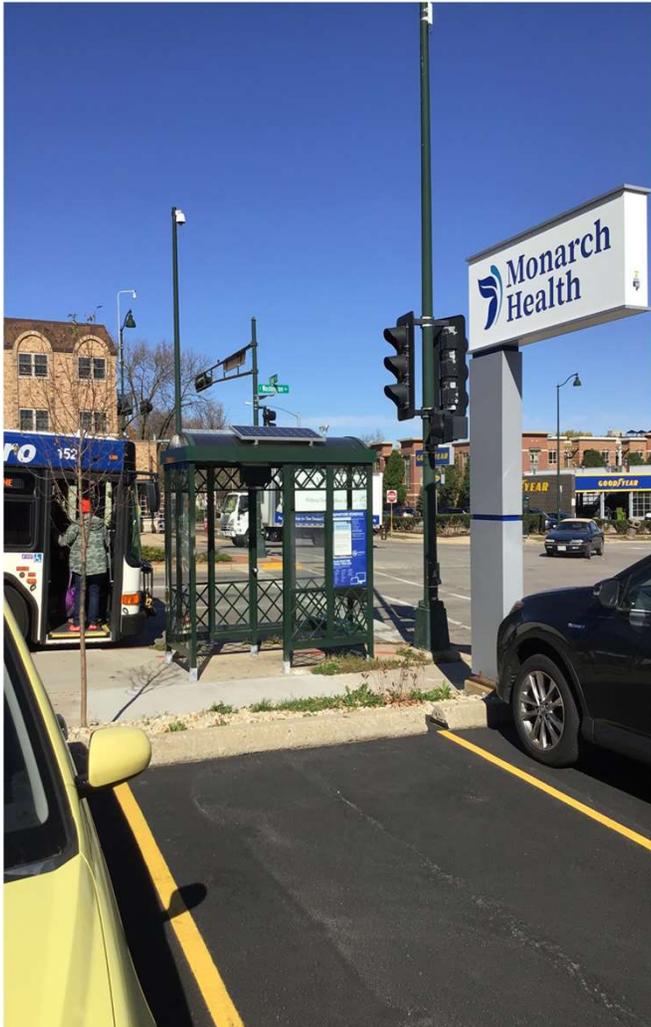
It can also stem from use by people who might not have an addiction but are using alcohol or other substances as an unhealthy coping mechanism during COVID-19.

## UW Health Addiction Experts





- COVID-19 is compounding drug and alcohol problems across Wisconsin, with opioid overdoses increasing by 117 percent since the start of the pandemic compared to the same time in 2019, according to [preliminary Department of Health Services data](#)



- Researchers say it's too soon to have definitive data on the pandemic's effects, but early numbers are concerning. So far, alcohol sales have risen by more than 25%. A recent analysis of 500,000 urine drug tests by Millennium Health, a national laboratory service, also showed worrisome trends: an increase of 32% for non prescribed fentanyl, 20% for methamphetamine, and 10% for cocaine from mid-March through May. And suspected drug overdoses climbed 18% in the same period, according to a national tracking system run out of the University of Baltimore.

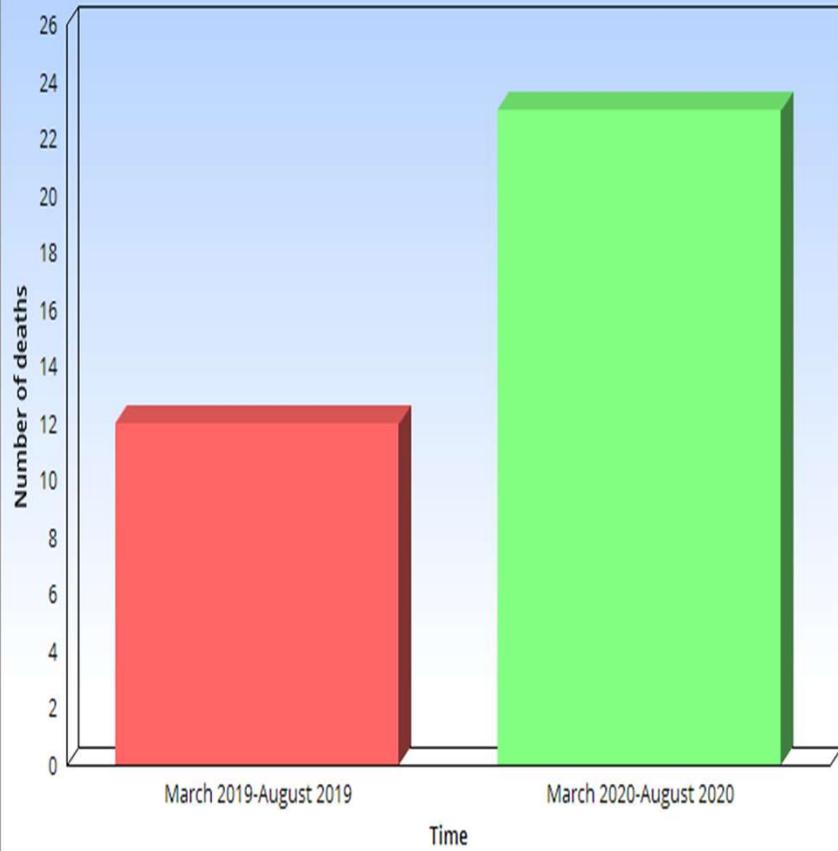




- The DHS released the preliminary data from emergency departments in late July showing there were 325 suspected opioid overdoses during a period from March to July, compared to 150 suspected overdoses during the same period in 2019.

### Madison Overdose Deaths

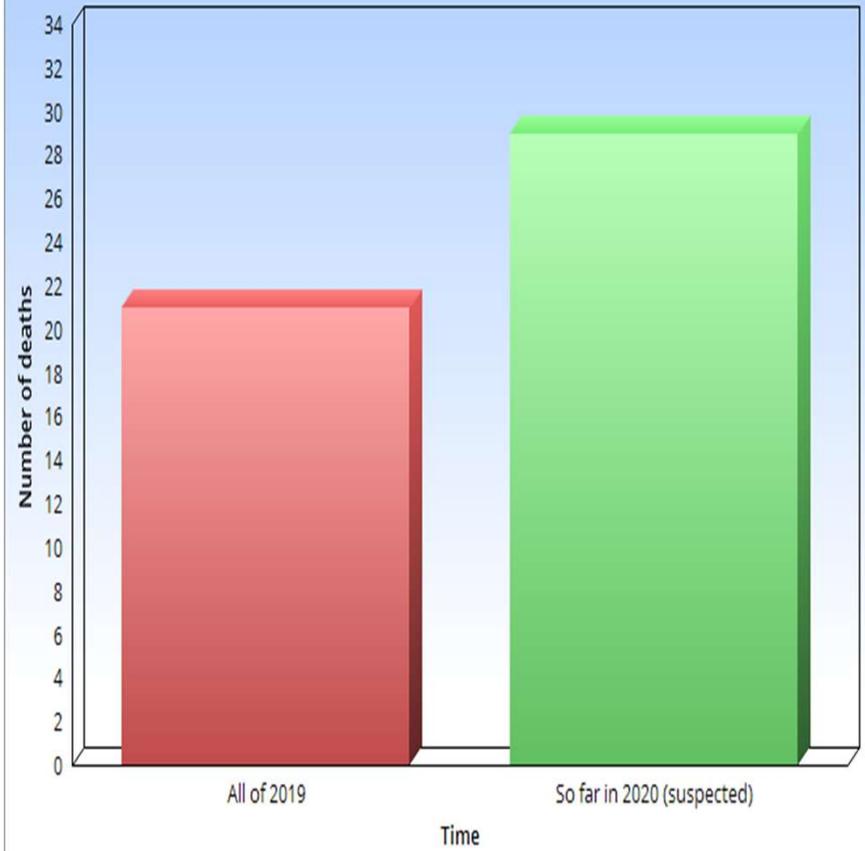
2019 vs. 2020



Source: Madison Police Department

### La Crosse County Overdose Deaths

2019 vs. 2020



Source: La Crosse County Medical Examiner



In La Crosse County, more people have died of suspected overdoses so far in 2020 than in all of 2019. Last year 21 people died of overdoses there. Chief Medical Examiner Tim Candahl said so far, they are investigating 29 suspected overdoses. They're still waiting on toxicology results to confirm the causes of death.

## Opioid overdose deaths in Wisconsin



SOURCE: Wisconsin Department of Health Services

State Journal

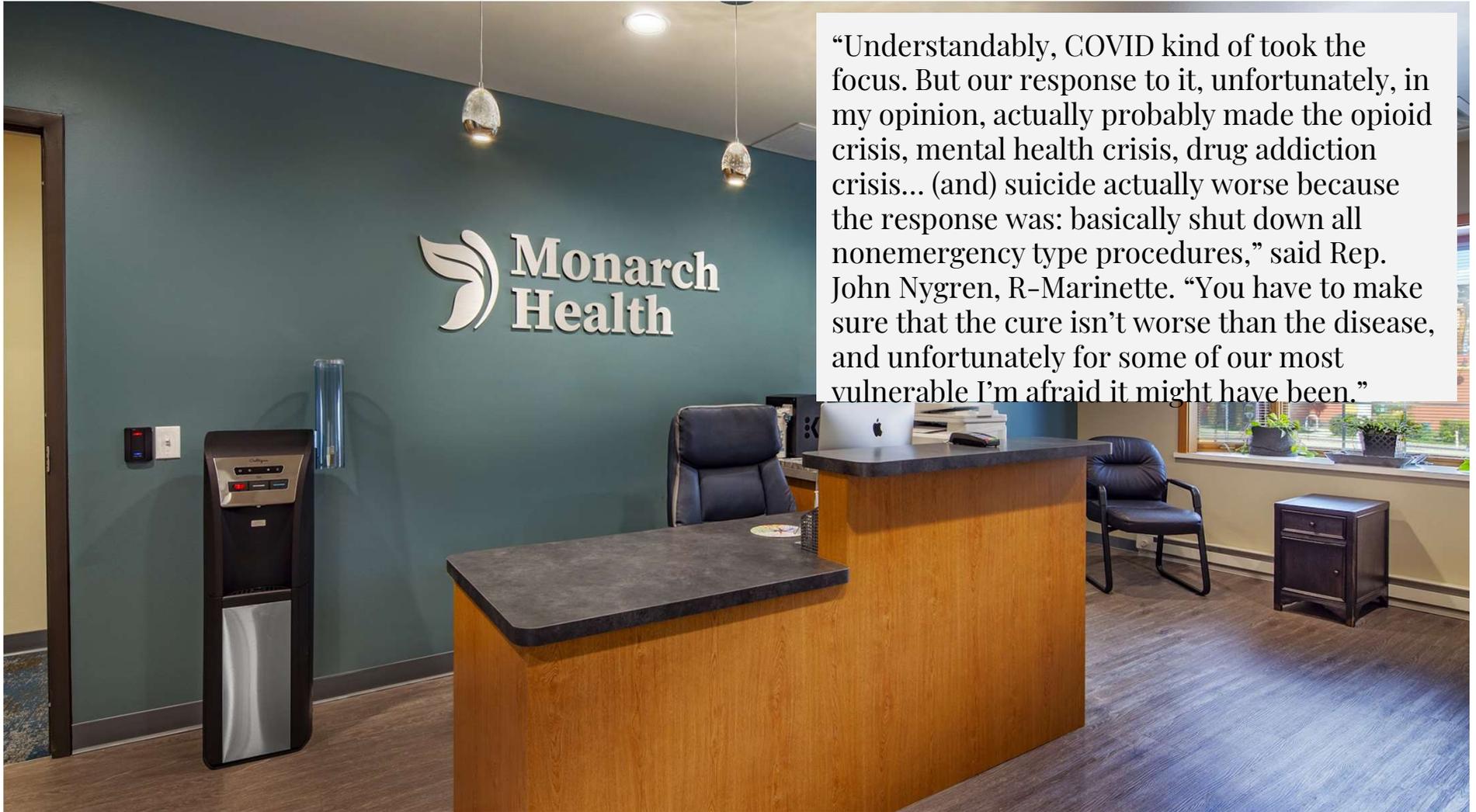
“We’re seeing people with addiction being impacted by COVID stress a little bit more than the rest of the population,” said Dr. Michael Miller, an addiction medicine specialist at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. “People who are not in good, longstanding recovery from addiction have deficient coping skills. They have a recent history of over-relying on drug use for quasi-coping.”



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What's more, drug use during COVID-19 can be particularly deadly. As the pandemic hobbled illicit drug supply chains, people with SUDs sometimes turned to new dealers or unfamiliar drugs — with unforeseen and dangerous consequences. In addition, more people have been overdosing alone, with no one nearby to help. "We're seeing more overdose cases going straight to the morgue rather than to the emergency department," says Daniel Buccino, clinical manager of the Johns Hopkins Broadway Center for Addiction.



“Understandably, COVID kind of took the focus. But our response to it, unfortunately, in my opinion, actually probably made the opioid crisis, mental health crisis, drug addiction crisis... (and) suicide actually worse because the response was: basically shut down all nonemergency type procedures,” said Rep. John Nygren, R-Marquette. “You have to make sure that the cure isn’t worse than the disease, and unfortunately for some of our most vulnerable I’m afraid it might have been.”



### **Monte Ball - Voices For Recovery**

**“What helps individuals to stay sober is to build a community by going to therapy, hanging out with friends who understand the path and attending sober events. While virtual peer support has allowed sponsors and support to easily reach people far away and in more remote regions of the state, Ball said that “it’s just not as personable — or effective. There’s something very special about being face to face and in the same room with those that are in recovery,” he said. “Seeing the energy, feeling the vibes and hearing the stories out of someone’s mouth other than a speaker in your laptop.”**

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