



Why don't we test more drunk drivers for other drugs?

Lila Ralston, MPH and Carol Cotton, PhD



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
College of Public Health

Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group, University of Georgia, Athens, GA

Introduction

Many drivers who test positive for alcohol also test positive for other drugs. These dual-intoxicated drivers are **23x more likely** to be the driver in a fatal crash than people who are not intoxicated (compared to 13x more likely for alcohol-only).¹

Problem drinkers are at **18x higher risk** for drug abuse.²

Those injured in crashes, especially if they have a history of drug use, are at increased risk for addiction.^{3,4}

Who Says We Should Test?

The Governors Highway Safety Association and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, among other experts and policymakers, recommend more drug testing of drivers involved in accidents.

Barriers

Expensive & Difficult: Other drug tests are more expensive, more difficult to administer, and much slower to yield results than Breathalyzer or blood alcohol tests.

Hard to Interpret: Unlike the BAC, test results for other drugs do not correlate closely with degree of impairment. This makes these results less convincing in court.

Not What the Laws Were Designed For: In many states, multidrug DUI is treated the same as alcohol-only DUI, so enforcement efforts focus mainly on alcohol. Some states' implied-consent laws do not include drugs other than alcohol.

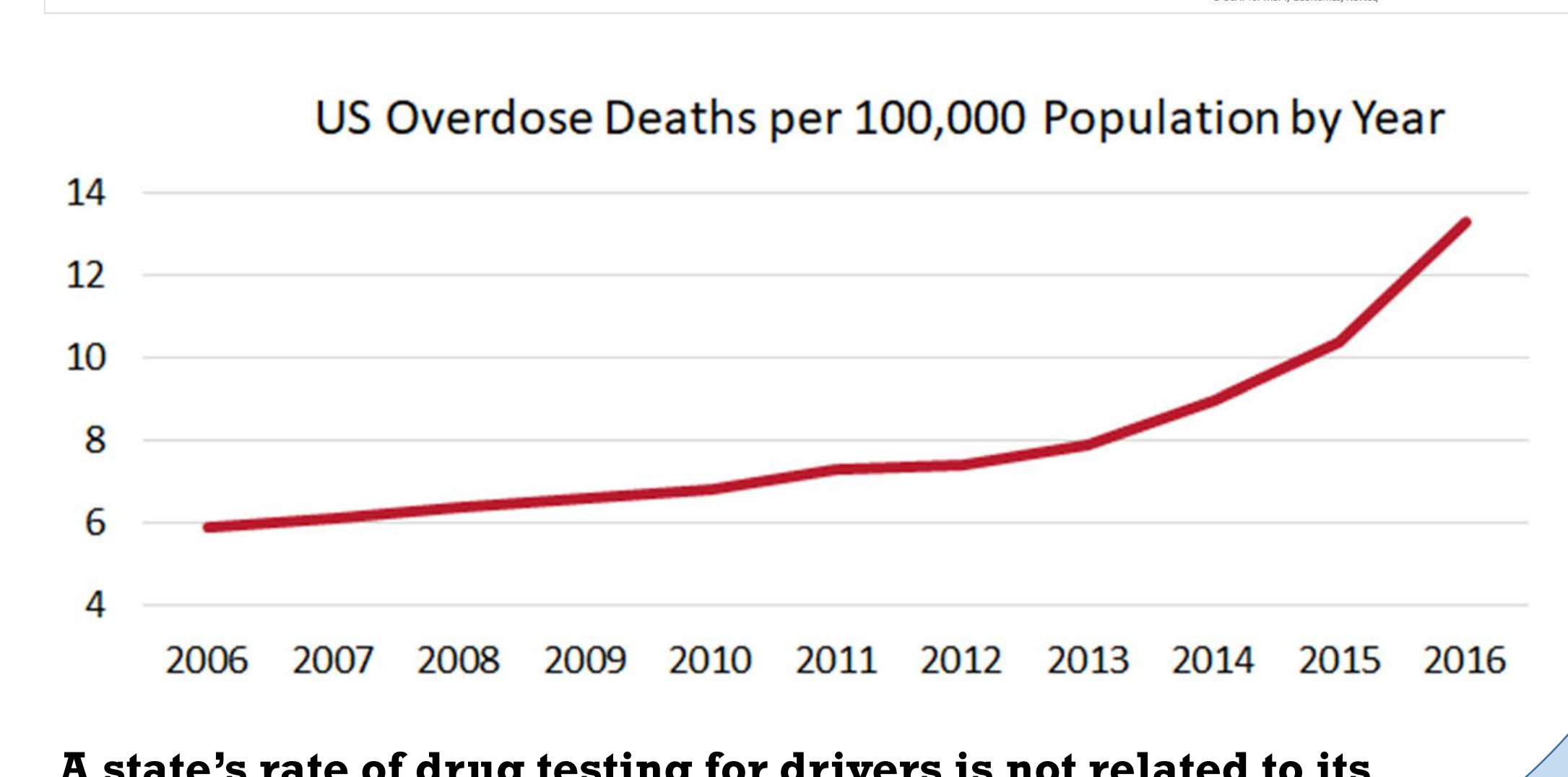
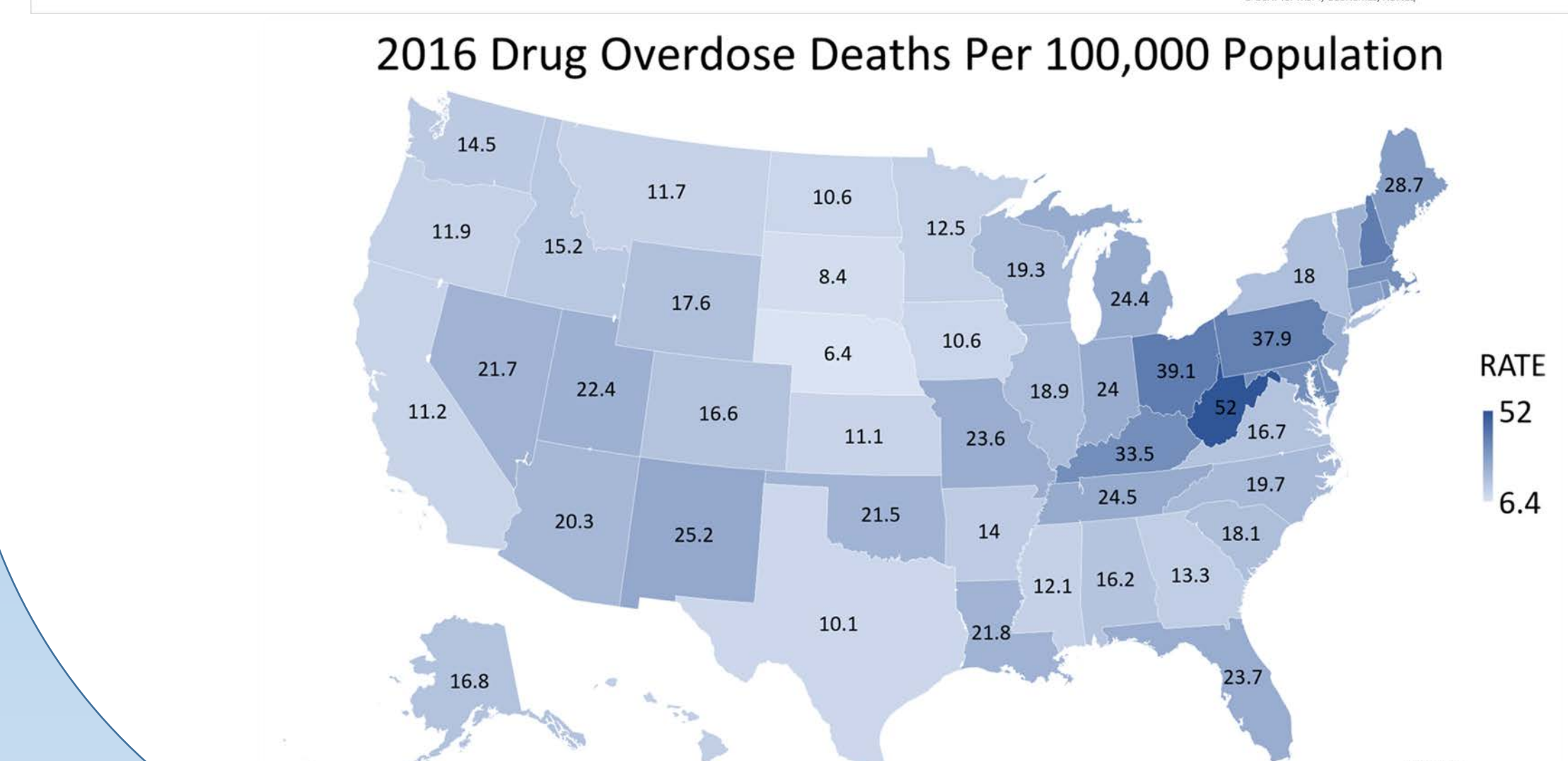
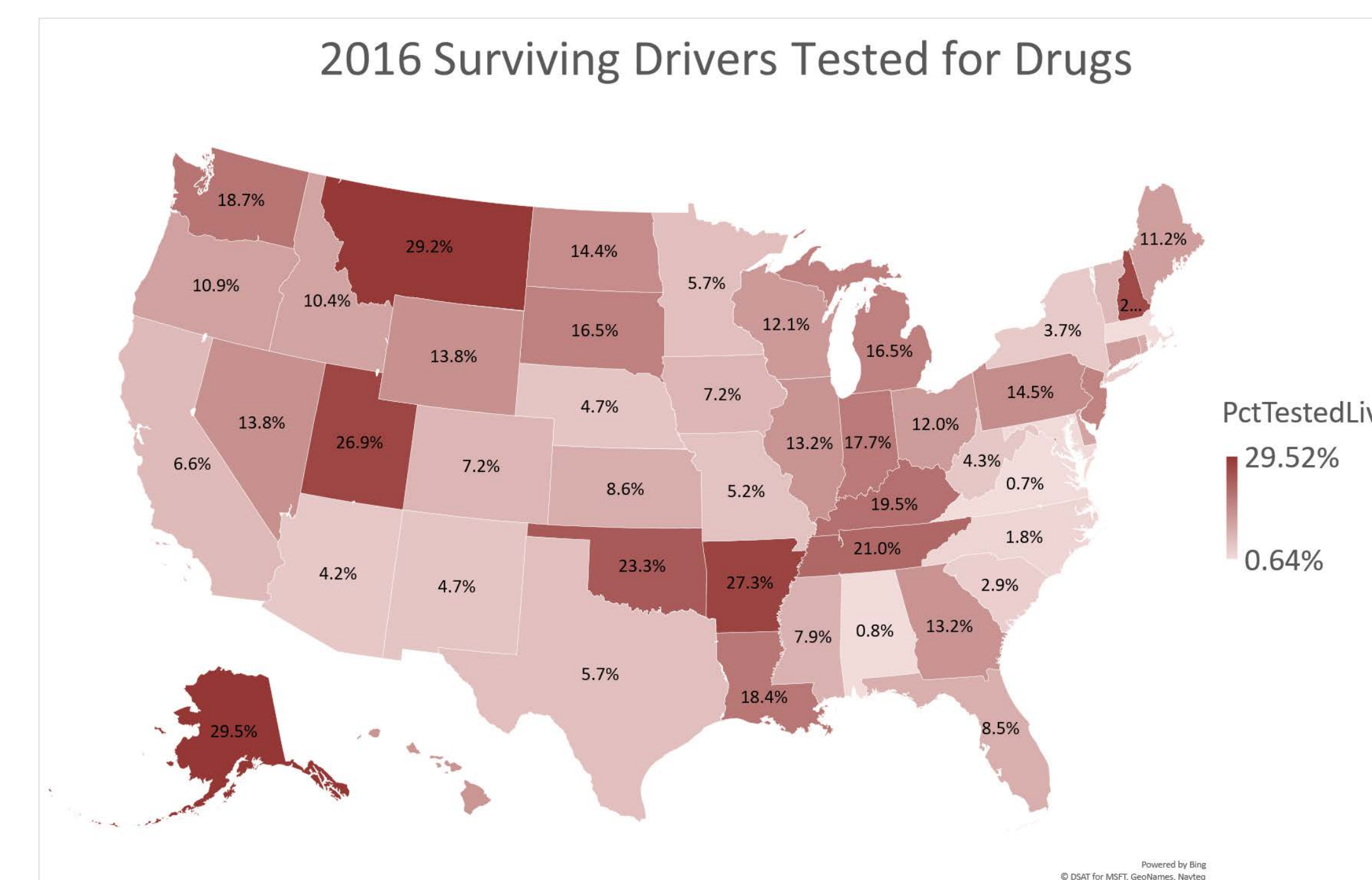
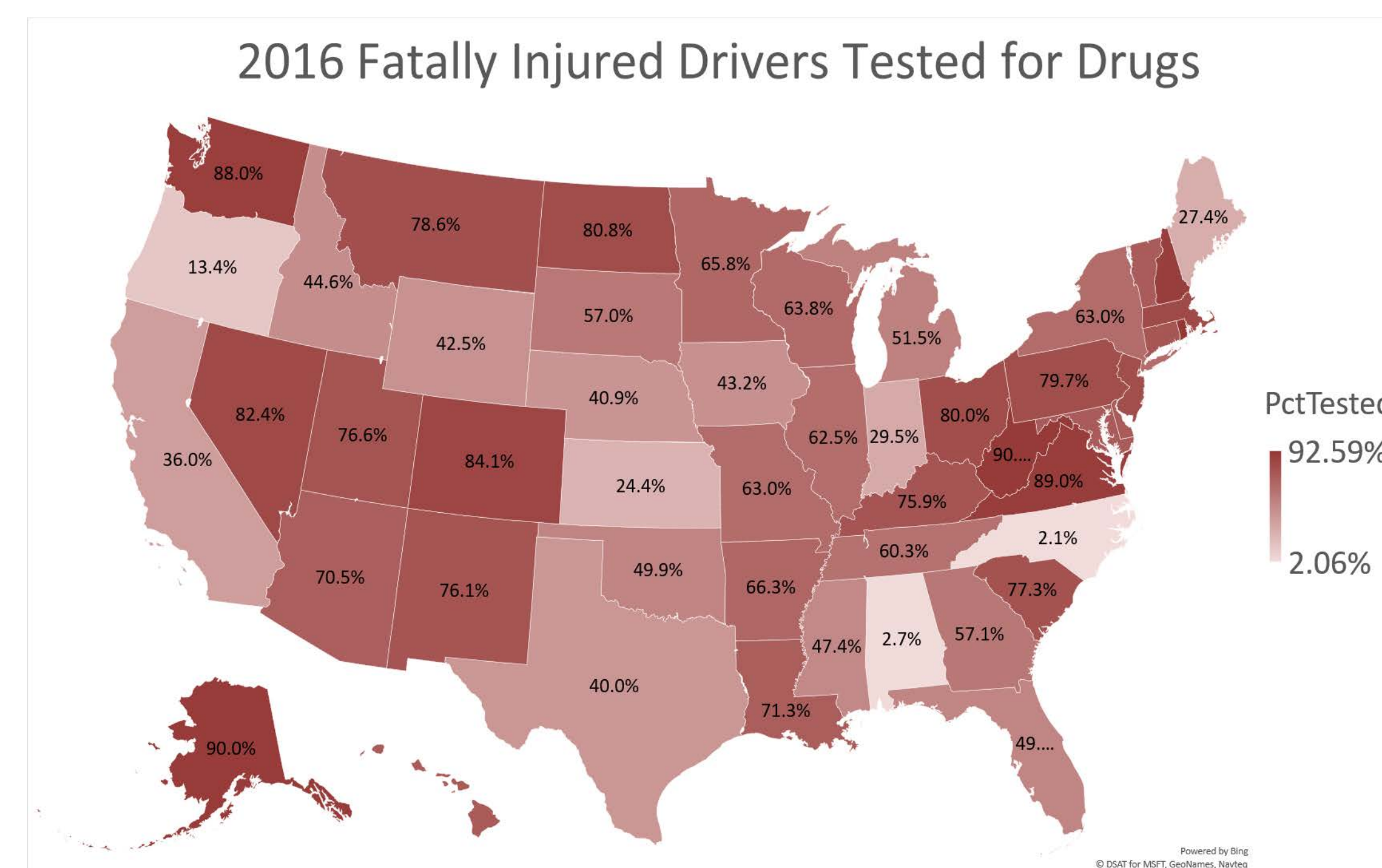
Why Test?

To understand the size of the problem. Drug use varies by location; each jurisdiction needs to know its own level of risk.

To justify requesting funds for countermeasures. Accurate data demonstrate the need for resources for enforcement and intervention.

To keep LEOs and the public safer. Knowing the risk of accidental exposure justifies protective measures.

To intervene earlier in the addiction process. Early treatment can save lives.



A state's rate of drug testing for drivers is not related to its overdose death rate ($r(48) = .25, p > .05$).

Funded by a grant from the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety

1. Li, Brady & Chen, 2013. 3. Morris & Mir, 2015.
2. McCabe et al., 2006. 4. Wu et al., 2016.

Lila Ralston, lfr32327@uga.edu
Carol Cotton, cpcotton@uga.edu

TSREG, 141 Wright Hall, 100 Foster Road, Athens GA 30602