



Department of
**Mental Health &
Substance Abuse Services**

Tennessee Recovery Navigators

FY26 Annual Report

Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services

August 2026

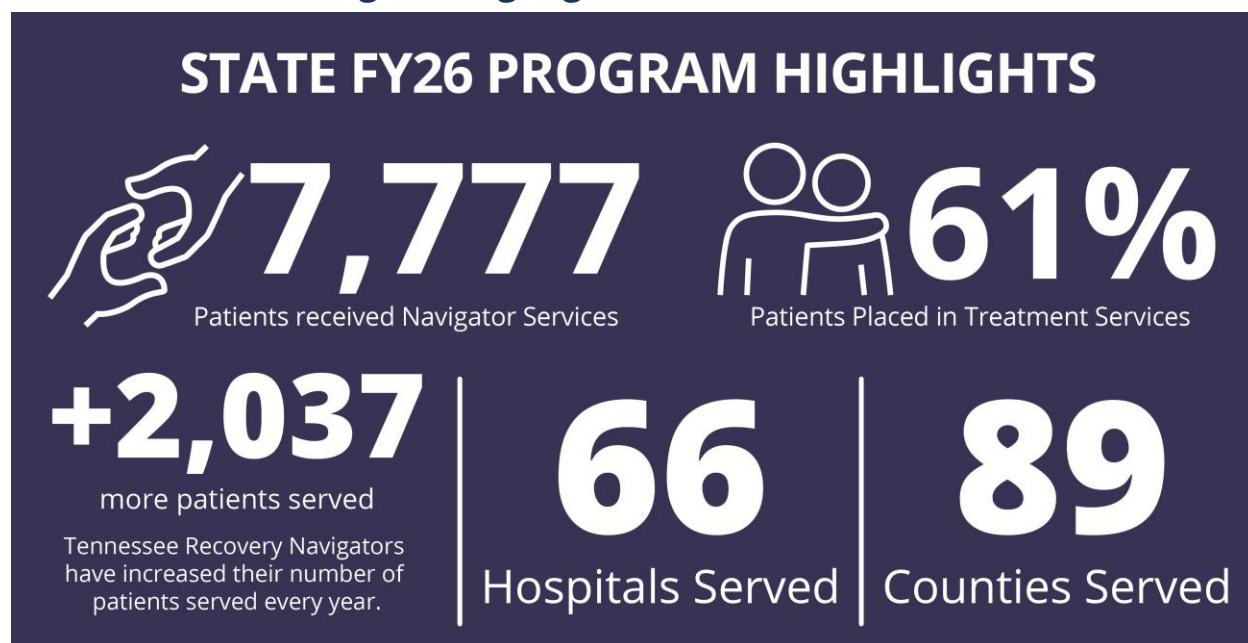


Program Overview

The Tennessee Recovery Navigator program is executed through partnerships between the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) and community treatment providers who employ the Navigators. Navigators are Certified Peer Recovery Specialists¹ who serve as a resource with lived experience of addiction for patients as well as hospital staff.

Tennessee Recovery Navigators (“Navigators”) are individuals in long-term recovery who are responsible for meeting patients in the hospital when they present due to an overdose, active withdrawal, or identify as having a primary substance use disorder, to connect them with treatment and recovery resources. Navigators are also responsible for following up with each patient they meet at 72 hours and 30 days following hospital discharge to ensure that patients have connected to the resources, are doing well, and to assess for and coordinate additional community referrals. Navigators are not clinicians, law enforcement, counselors, or sponsors for the patients they meet in the hospital.

Fiscal Year 2026 Program Highlights



*Navigators can serve Tennesseans from all 95 counties. In FY26, they served referrals from a total of 89 counties.

¹ [TN.gov/behavioral-health/cprs](https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/cprs)

History & Background

The Tennessee Recovery Navigator (TRN) Program was established in 2018 as part of the TN Together Initiative, Tennessee's comprehensive response to the opioid epidemic. The program was designed to place Certified Peer Recovery Specialists (CPRS) in hospital emergency departments to engage patients experiencing substance use crises, provide hope through lived experience, and connect them to treatment and recovery supports. What began as a targeted initiative has grown into a statewide network that partners with hospitals, treatment providers, and community organizations to ensure Tennesseans have immediate access to recovery support when they need it most.

Since its inception, the program has expanded through continued investments from the TDMHSAS, the Tennessee Department of Health, and the Office of Criminal Justice Programs. Along the way, the program has adapted to meet changing needs by incorporating telehealth services, increasing hospital coverage, and inspiring innovative initiatives such as emergency department medication-assisted treatment (MAT) pilots. These partnerships and innovations have allowed Recovery Navigators to reach more hospitals, serve more patients, and strengthen Tennessee's continuum of care.

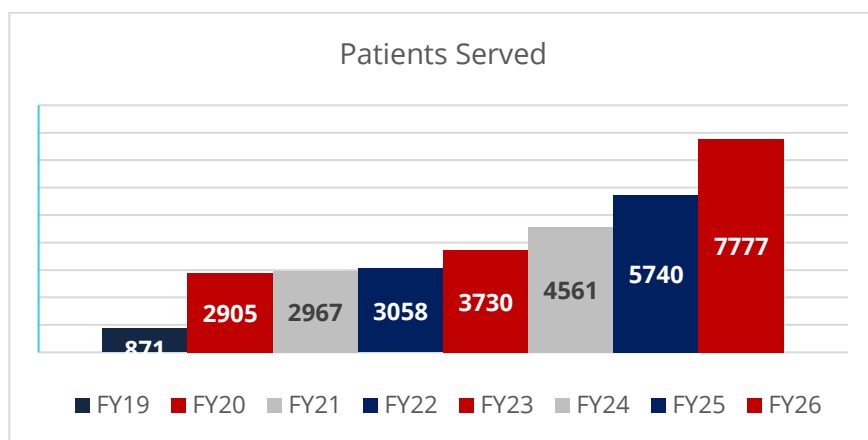
Current Tennessee Navigator Providers

Provider	Location
Cocaine and Alcohol Awareness Program (CAAP)	Shelby County
Pathways	Madison County and Surrounding Areas
Buffalo Valley, Inc.	Davidson County and Surrounding Areas
Volunteer Behavioral Health Care System	Putnam County
Council for Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services (CADAS)	Hamilton County
River Valley Health	Knox County and Surrounding Areas
McNabb Center	Hamblen County and Surrounding Areas
Frontier Health	Tri-Cities

Spotlight on Navigator Data

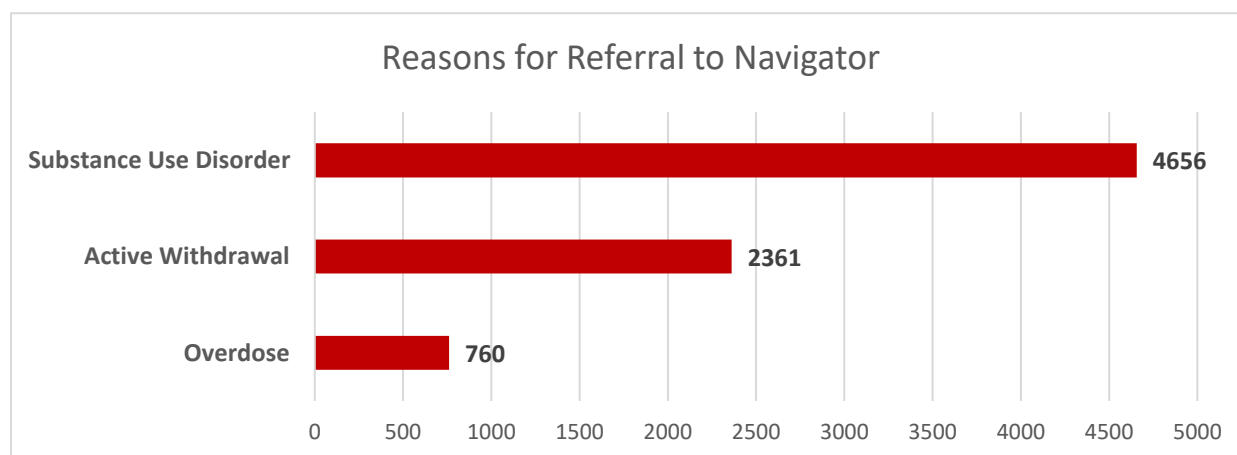
Patient Interactions

The Navigators continue to see an increase in patient interactions year to year. Since inception, the TN Recovery Navigator program has supported more than **31,000** individuals. The Navigator program greatly increased the number of patients receiving support from FY25 to FY26 by **2,037 patients (+35%)**, exceeding the year's goal of 4,500 patients by more than 3,000.

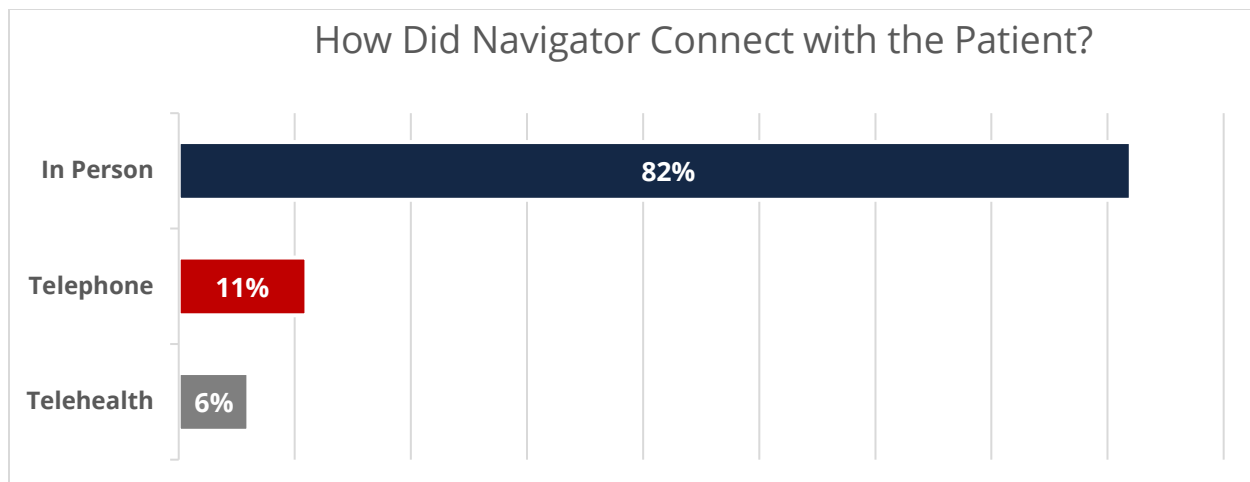


In FY26, 7,777 individuals were served by the TN Recovery Navigator Program. A 35% increase from FY25.

Patients are referred to the Navigators by emergency department staff when they present due to an overdose, are in active withdrawal, or identify as having a primary substance use disorder. The chart below shows the breakdown of the reasons for referral in FY26.



Out of necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the TN Recovery Navigators began offering occasional telehealth and telephone services. What began as an emergency response has since become a valuable component of the program by allowing Navigators to cover a larger service area and connect more patients that might otherwise go unserved due to geographic distance.



Patient Demographics

The Navigators capture demographic information (gender, race, age) on all the individuals they serve who are willing to disclose. The program continues to assess ways to outreach to at-risk and underserved populations.

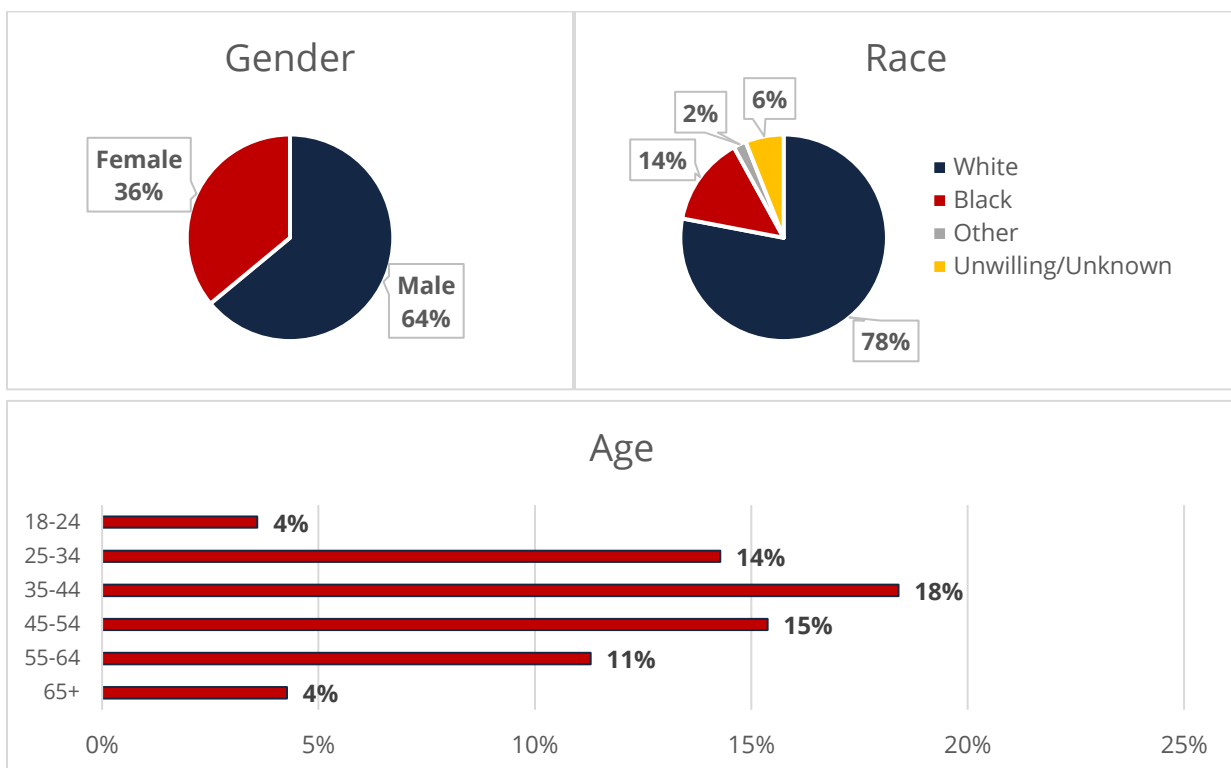


Figure 1. Demographic Data of Clients Served

*33% patients did not disclose age.

Navigator Testimonial

"After surviving a sexual assault, a woman initially declined treatment but accepted information from a Recovery Navigator before leaving the emergency department. The next day, she called ready for help. With her Navigator's support, she entered behavioral health treatment and is now preparing for long-term recovery. Today, the fear and uncertainty she once carried have been replaced with hope and a renewed sense of purpose."

Patient Placements

In FY26, the Navigators were able to connect 4,726 individuals to treatment or a recovery resource - this is a **61%** placement rate. Of the patients not connected to treatment, 54% either refused treatment or did not require a level of care higher than reengagement with recovery resources, such as AA or NA and 33% were not yet medically cleared to leave the hospital. Navigators meet with patients in the hospital to understand their unique needs, goals, and insurance coverage, then help connect them to the level of care that best fits their situation, while prioritizing patient choice.

61% of individuals seen by a Navigator were connected to treatment or a recovery resource.

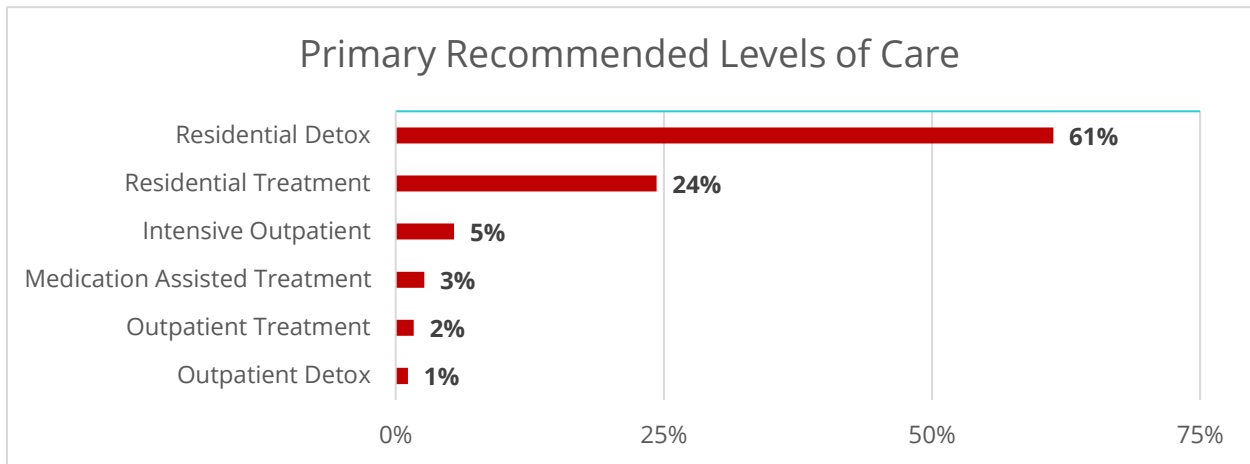


Figure 2. Primary Recommended Levels of Care

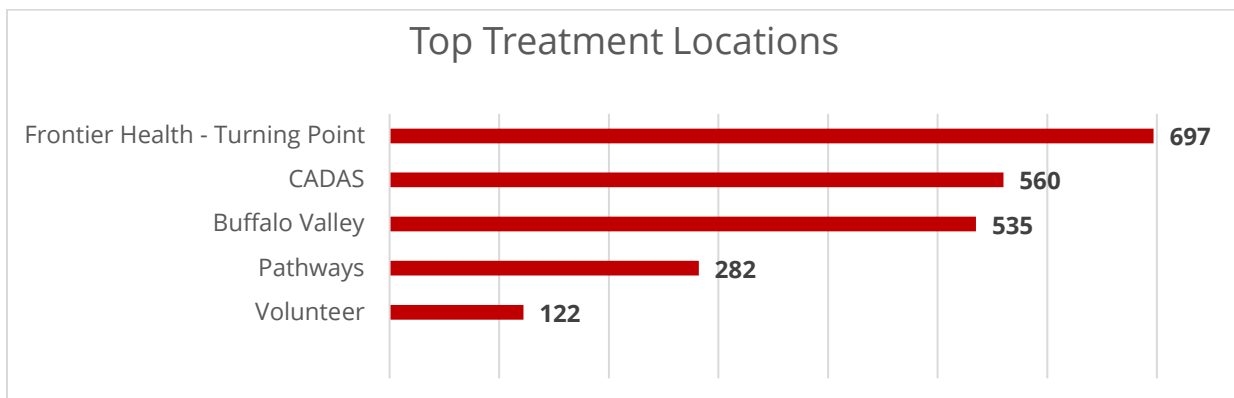


Figure 3. Top Treatment Locations

Family Member Testimonial

"I wanted to take a moment to thank you for visiting with my brother while he was in the hospital last week. Of all the individuals we came into contact with that week, I believe you had the most profound impact on my brother's life. For you sharing how AA has positively impacted your life, my brother attended his first ever AA meeting last night. Thank you for sharing your story. But I thank you more for getting sober, reconnecting with your children, and sharing those tribulations and triumphs with others!"

Patient Insurance Type

Recovery Navigators serve any individual who presents to an emergency department following an overdose, while experiencing active withdrawal, or who identifies as having a substance use disorder, regardless of insurance status. Although insurance coverage does not affect eligibility for Navigator services, it helps Navigators identify treatment options that best meet each individual's needs. As shown in **Figure 4**, the majority of individuals served are uninsured.

60% of individuals served by the Navigators were uninsured or covered by TennCare.

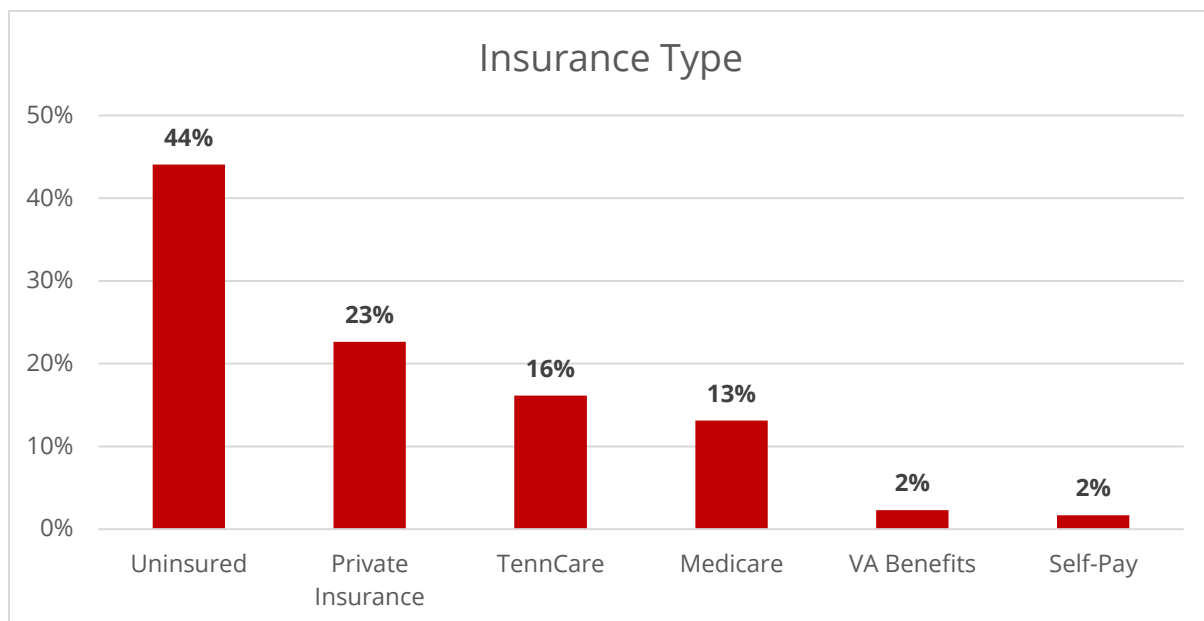


Figure 4. Patient Insurance Type

Navigator Testimonial

"A client I have been working with since January finally went to detox and followed through with aftercare. She is 27 days clean today and in a sober living program. She was in and out of the hospital for months, but each time, she knew who to call – our Navigator. She always shares how the Navigator program being inside the hospital saved her life."

Top Substances of Use

Primary, secondary, and tertiary substance of use is documented for every individual served. This helps the Navigator identify the most appropriate treatment type. Figure 5 shows the top five (5) overall self-identified substance choices for the individuals served through the navigator program in FY26.

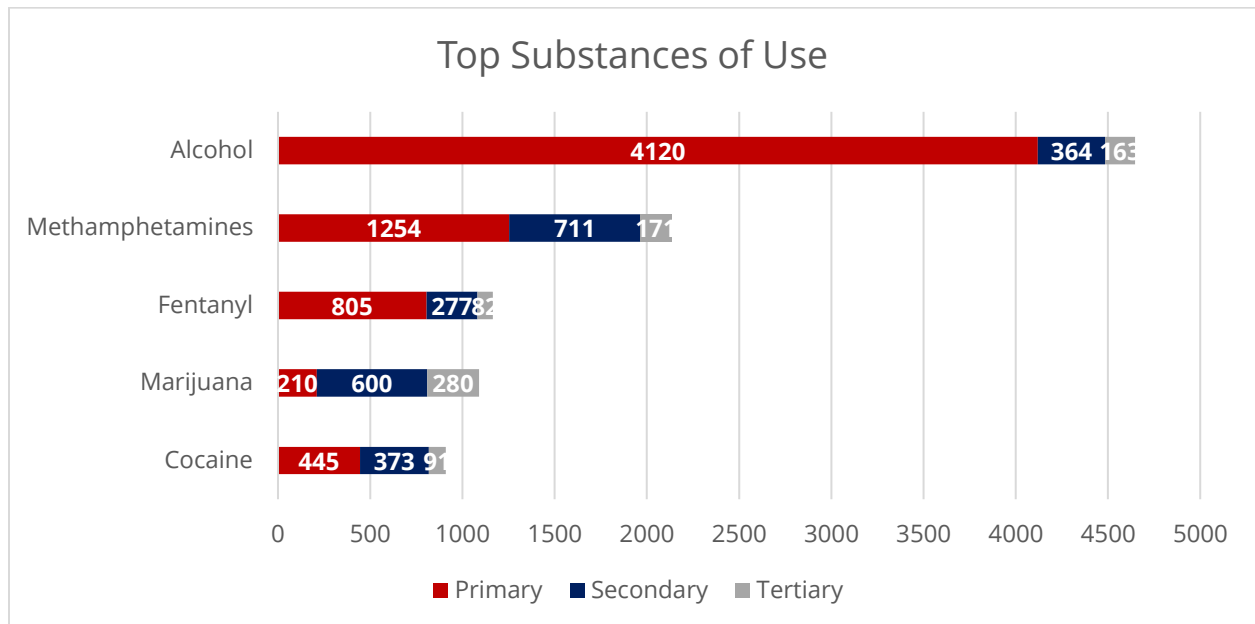


Figure 5. Top Substances of Use

Consistent with what was seen in FY25, alcohol remained the top reported substance of abuse, with methamphetamine and cocaine use continuing to rise as primary substances in FY26, while fentanyl declined slightly. Additionally, FY26 saw an increase in reported kratom use, leading to the addition of kratom as a tracked substance within the program. This information as well as other program data collected by TDMHSAS helps identify the areas of need across Tennessee and ensures that the programs being funded by the department are efficient and serving the most vulnerable Tennesseans.

Participating Hospitals

- Methodist Medical Center*
- Camden General Hospital*
- Erlanger Bledsoe Hospital
- Blount Memorial Hospital
- Bradley Medical Center
- Sycamore Shoals Hospital
- Claiborne Medical Center
- Newport Medical Center
- Cumberland Medical Center*
- HCA, TriStar Skyline
- HCA, Southern Hills
- HCA, Summit
- HCA, TriStar Centennial
- Ascension, St. Thomas Midtown
- Ascension, St. Thomas West
- Vanderbilt University Medical Center
- Nashville General
- St. Thomas DeKalb
- WTH Dyersburg Hospital
- Southern TN Regional – Sewanee
- Milan General Hospital
- Greeneville Community Hospital
- Morristown/Hamblen County Medical
- CHI Memorial
- CHI Memorial – Hixson
- Erlanger Baroness
- Erlanger East
- Erlanger North
- Parkridge Camp Jordan
- Parkridge Medical Center
- Parkridge North Hospital
- Parkridge East
- Hancock County Hospital
- Bolivar General
- Hawkins County Memorial Hospital
- Jefferson Memorial Hospital
- Johnson County Memorial Hospital
- UT Medical Center
- Jackson-Madison County General
- WTH North Hospital*
- Parkridge West Hospital
- Starr Regional – Athens
- Starr Regional – Etowah
- Livingston Regional
- Cookeville Regional Medical Center
- Rhea Medical Center
- Ascension, St. Thomas Rutherford
- HCA, Stonecrest
- Erlanger Sequatchie Valley
- LeConte Medical Center
- Baptist East
- Methodist LeBonheur
- Methodist North
- Methodist South
- Methodist University
- Regional One
- St. Francis
- Holston Valley Medical Center
- Indian Path Medical Center
- Bristol Regional Medical Center
- Sumner w/ Ascension St. Thomas
- Tristar Hendersonville
- Unicoi County Memorial Hospital
- St. Thomas River Park
- Franklin Woods Community Hospital
- Johnson City Medical Center
- WTH Volunteer Hospital
- St. Thomas Highlands

***Added in FY26**

Navigator Testimonial

"I first met a young woman after she was sent to the ER for medical clearance. Pathways did not have a grant bed available until the next morning, and after she was medically cleared around midnight, she had nowhere to go. I offered another treatment option, but it wasn't where she wanted to be. Instead, I told her she could stay in the ER waiting room for the night, and I would return at 6:30 the next morning to take her to Pathways. Before I left, I made sure she had a blanket, food, and water. The next morning, she was still there, waiting. I took her to Pathways, and today she is eight months clean and sober at Aspell Recovery Center. The transformation in her is incredible.

This story reminds me why this work matters. We do not always get to see what happens after someone leaves our care, and it can feel like we're pouring into person after person without knowing if we've made a difference. But sometimes, helping one person make it through one difficult night can change the course of an entire life. Seeing where she is today reminds me why we keep showing up and why we never stop believing that recovery is possible."

Final Thoughts

The Tennessee Recovery Navigator Program continues to demonstrate the power of peer support to transform lives. Every interaction between a Navigator and a patient represents an opportunity to replace stigma with compassion, inspire hope, and create a pathway to lasting recovery. While the number of patients served continues to grow, the true impact of the program is reflected in the individuals, families, and communities whose lives have been changed through these connections.

As the program enters another year of growth, TDMHSAS remains committed to expanding access to recovery support across Tennessee and strengthening partnerships with hospitals and community providers. The success of the Navigator Program is a testament to the dedication of the Navigators, provider agencies, hospital partners, and state leaders who believe that recovery is possible. Together, they are helping build a healthier Tennessee—one conversation, one connection, and one recovery story at a time.

If you would like to learn more about the TN Recovery Navigator program, please visit [TN.gov/recoverynavigators](https://tn.gov/recoverynavigators). If you have any further questions or if you would like your hospital to start participating in the TN Recovery Navigator program, please reach out to Kaili Hardiman at Kaili.Hardiman@tn.gov.