As opioids become more difficult and expensive to abuse, heroin use is on the rise in Florida, according to law enforcement officials. A similar trend has been reported around the country.

The Miami Herald reports an analysis of drug-related deaths in 2011 shows heroin is one of the state's most harmful drugs.

Heroin-related deaths increased by 18.8 percent, to 62 deaths, compared with the previous year. The number of deaths from heroin use is down from a high of 270 in 2001, the newspaper notes.

The recent increase is worrying to local drug rehabilitation experts. They report seeing more patients who have switched from oxycodone or other prescription drugs to heroin in the last year.

"When I ask my patients, they say, 'Yeah, I couldn't get oxycodone, and now I'm using heroin, four or five bags,'" Dr. Patricia Junquera of Jackson Memorial Hospital's detox unit told the newspaper. "I think more people are switching to heroin."

A study published in July 2012 found OxyContin abuse has decreased now that the painkiller has been reformulated to make it more difficult to misuse. Many people who abused the drug have switched to heroin, the researchers reported in the New England Journal of Medicine. In 2010, the company that makes OxyContin introduced a new version of the drug that is more difficult to inhale or inject.

Florida has taken a number of measures in the past several years designed to reduce prescription drug abuse.

In June 2011, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed into law a bill designed to cut down on prescription drug abuse by controlling "pill mills" in the state.

The law authorized the creation of a prescription-drug monitoring database to reduce doctor-shopping by people looking to collect multiple painkiller prescriptions. The legislation also imposed new penalties for physicians who overprescribe medication and imposes stricter rules for operating pharmacies.

Drug addiction can lead to criminal behavior. The use of illegal drugs is often associated with murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/theft, serious motor vehicle offenses with dangerous consequences, arson and hate crimes. Without question, drug use and criminality are closely linked. Click here to read about drugs and crime.