

Opioid Response Project: Summary of Findings & Recommendations



Overview

Opioid use and overdose continue to have a devastating impact on communities across Alaska. Alaska continues to have one of the highest overdose death rates in the United States. The impact of opioid use is particularly significant among young adults (ages 25–34) and Alaska Native communities, which face intersecting challenges such as trauma, housing instability, and limited access to behavioral health services.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues by disrupting treatment and recovery services, increasing social isolation and stress, and contributing to greater exposure to fentanyl in the local drug supply.

Current Landscape

Anchorage has an opportunity to build a stronger, more compassionate, and coordinated response to the opioid crisis. By reducing stigma, expanding access to care, and investing in recovery-oriented systems, the Municipality and its partners can save lives, promote healing, and strengthen community well-being.

Key Priorities & Recommendations

Reducing Stigma & Strengthen Harm Reduction

Promote understanding of substance use disorder as a **chronic, treatable health condition**.

Expand **training in harm reduction and trauma-informed care** for healthcare providers and first responders.

Increase access to **peer recovery support services**, particularly for justice-involved and unhoused populations.

Connect recovery efforts with **safe and stable housing** and **workforce development opportunities**.

Enhance Collaboration Between Health & Safety System

Strengthen coordination among **public health, behavioral health, emergency services, and law enforcement**.

Expand **co-response and diversion programs** (such as Mobile Crisis Teams) that connect individuals to care rather than incarceration.

Ensure access to **Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)** in correctional facilities and during re-entry.

Expand Access to Treatment & Recovery Services

Scale up **evidence-based care models** that combine medication and behavioral therapy.

Provide ongoing provider training in **Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)**.

Use **telehealth** to reach rural and underserved communities.

Sustain and coordinate funding through **opioid settlement resources** and the **Medicaid 1115 Behavioral Health Waiver (2024–2028)**.

OPIOID IMPACTS ACROSS ALASKA

342 opioid-related deaths in 2023

40% increase in opioid-related deaths from 2022 to 2023

25-34 Age range most impacted by opioid use

ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITIES experience disproportionate impacts