

Las Animas-Huerfano County District Health Department Huerfano County Opioid Settlement Project Narrative

STATEMENT OF NEED

Las Animas and Huerfano Counties District Health Department (LAHCDHD) coordinates and provides services in Huerfano County, which is experiencing a rapid rise in Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD).

- ❖ **Overdose deaths disproportionately impact communities** already experiencing higher rates of discrimination and criminalization based on such factors as race, gender and socioeconomic status.
- ❖ Huerfano County is a **medically underserved community** and experiences many inequities, such as intergenerational poverty, adverse childhood experiences, food insecurity, trauma, homelessness and lack of resources for prevention, treatment and recovery.
- ❖ **Stigmatized mental health and self-treatment with SUD's/OUD's**, marijuana and/or alcohol is an entrenched culture. Such stigmatization leads to social exclusion, adverse physical and mental health outcomes and is associated with SUD.
- ❖ Per the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Huerfano is ranked **55 out of 64 Colorado counties** in health outcomes.
- ❖ It is among a small sub-set that **lead Colorado in opioid addiction and related death.**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

LAHCDHD's goal is to significantly reduce adverse health effects associated with opioids by addressing community needs through collaboration and prevention. We implement efforts in Huerfano County to prevent overdose, reduce harms associated with drug use and address substance use as a public health issue rather than a criminal legal system issue. We seek to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with substance use disorders (SUDs) and opioid use disorders (OUDs) in Huerfano County through a combination of prevention, treatment, and recovery strategies.

To decrease stigma, LAHCDHD takes a tiered approach that requires unbiased relationships, continuing education, prevention, treatment and recovery of SUD/OUD. Through a strong regional collaboration, we address the growing problem that SUDs and OUDs present within our communities. We partnered with the CU College of Nursing, which has led a strong community partnership including government, law enforcement, medical, mental health, businesses, community leaders and citizens to form a coalition to work together around SUD/ OUD-identified needs. Growing from a grassroots effort, this coalition has defined a strategic plan to address prevention, treatment and recovery of substance and opioid abuse.

Prevention & Education

Working in coalition, LAHCDHD created and distributes messages to raise awareness and reduce stigma across the community. Marketing materials aimed at educating the public highlight recovery and help individuals who are struggling with SUD find current resources and

services in the region, using academic partners' experience in delivering tailored programs in community settings. Message content and campaign acceptability, feasibility, and preliminary efficacy was preliminary tested in a small group of stakeholders.

Prevention educational materials for the general public include:

- materials on Naloxone
- the stigma associated with SUD/ODU
- materials that cover the safe use, storage and disposal of prescription drugs

We have been successful with presentations and trainings related to Naloxone, SUD, mental health first aid and more. Past attendees include medical, mental health, law enforcement, judicial, agencies/businesses, community partners and citizens. Community health workers (working at libraries, community centers, and the Department of Social Services) were trained to administer naloxone in emergency situations.

To prevent the initiation of drug use among youth, the Botvin LifeSkills curriculum is currently being implemented through our OBH and TGYS grants within some of our schools. This is an evidence-based program shown to decrease substance abuse and violence among participants.

Activities to raise awareness and change include:

Anti-Stigma Campaign. We propose expanding a public education campaign to raise public awareness related to harm reduction and lowering stigma related to substance use. Messages of recovery, education and promotion of MAT services and other resources encourage residents to seek health care regarding SUD will be fully disseminated and tested for impact. The campaign will be launched through pamphlets/flyers, social media (Facebook/Tweeter, Instagram, etc.) and diverse media campaigns (newspaper/radio).

Program awareness and visibility. We are producing updated marketing materials aimed at bringing greater awareness to the availability of substance abuse treatment and recovery resources. We are promoting programs related to both new and re-emerging SUD/ODU.

Community events. Through collaboration with community-based organizations serving youth and families, we will engage in outreach and promotion of harm reduction strategies and an anti-stigma campaign in various social activities held in the county.

Activities on substance use and harm reduction trainings and education include:

First responders and community 'response' education in using Fentanyl test strips (FTS) and Narcan kits includes first respondents, law enforcement and community health workers. We then target people who use drugs and community members at large.

Provider Education to enhance access to treatment, prescribing guidance and awareness of the Harm Reduction Strategies. LAHCDHD is working with the [Colorado Consortium](#) for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention to line up speakers (e.g. Drs. Blum, Dr. Valuk) to provide in person and virtual provider education.

Community education presentations to parents, students, law enforcement, schools, business owners and community members.

Treatment

Previous funding has created and increased access to Medication Assisted Treatment Expansion (MAT) in the region along with our partners Spanish Peaks Regional Health Center (SPRHC), Health Solutions and Front Range Clinics.

Activities to serve individuals in treatment for SUD/OD include:

Refer individuals to Spanish Peaks and Frontrange clinics for MAT services.

Re-start SUD/OD screenings in the county that had been put on hold due to the COVID pandemic and a loss of funding in the health and criminal justice systems.

Harm Reduction

We provide Naloxone to community members through a partnership with Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) Naloxone Bulk Fund. Fentanyl test strips (FTS) are made available through a grant from CDPHE, and we provide education and FTS with a goal of preventing deaths in the county. We train Public Health Nurses to provide the Naloxone training/education to community, first responders, law enforcement, fire, ambulance, schools, Emergency Rooms and more.

Distribute Fentanyl test strips (FTS) as a low-cost method of helping prevent overdoses by detecting the presence of fentanyl in pills, powder, and injectables. In this project we will focus training, tracking and distribution of FTS to ensure availability to demand, along with harm reduction trainings (see below).

Narcan (Naloxone) distribution and outreach. Naloxone (Narcan) is an opioid antagonist medication that is used to reverse an opioid overdose. We will provide trainings on how to use Naloxone, and provide it through the Naloxone Bulk Purchase Fund to the county. We will also disseminate educational materials on how to use Naloxone for a drug overdose.

Provide Storage and safe disposal resources. Safe storage and disposal of prescription medications that have the potential for misuse, abuse or diversion is a recognized harm reduction strategy. We will distribute medication lock boxes throughout the community (i.e. community health service sites, probation, funeral homes, law enforcement agencies, library, etc.) regularly used service, particularly with the rapid increase in Fentanyl use and related overdoses, which also requires higher doses to prevent deaths. There are currently one safe medication disposal box available in Huerfano County

Criminal Justice

Drug/alcohol overdose is the third leading cause of death in jails, following illness and suicide. Furthermore, the risk of death from opioid overdose is high after release from prison or jail. Opioid overdose results in death from coma and cessation of breathing, but is reversible through the immediate administration of a quick-acting opioid antagonist called Naloxone that blocks the

action of the opioid, e.g., heroin, fentanyl or prescription opioids. Its administration typically results in return to consciousness, resumption of breathing, and, in cases of opioid dependence, onset of opioid withdrawal symptoms. Naloxone is safe, effective, and non-addictive and has a rapid onset of action. It can be administered as an injection or through the nose (intranasally). Training in its administration is relatively simple. It can be safely used by nonmedical personnel, resulting in more lives saved.

Activities to distribute Harm Reduction materials in the criminal justice system include: \

Support Naloxone access for inmates. LAHCDHD will serve as a fiscal sponsor for Huerfano County jail as needed to provide Naloxone supplies and training for inmates being released.

Recovery

Recovery is a process of change through which people improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. Even people with severe and chronic substance use disorders can, with help, overcome their illness and regain health and social function. This is called remission. Being in recovery is when those positive changes and values become part of a voluntarily adopted lifestyle. While many people in recovery believe that abstinence from all substance use is a cardinal feature of a recovery lifestyle, others report that handling negative feelings without using substances and living a contributive life are more important parts of their recovery.

Activities for individuals in recovery include:

Referrals to services. LAHCDHD will refer individuals to recovery services Crossroads Turning Point in Huerfano, Southeast Colorado and Pueblo County, and mental health providers for inpatient and outpatient services.

EVALUATION

- Routinely collect and analyze regional data associated with program activities, including: SUD/ODU screening, referrals to services as well as fatal and non-fatal overdoses.
- Establish monitoring of FTS, naloxone kits and medication boxes distribution/utilization.
- Evaluate the impact of our education effort and the anti-stigma campaign.
- Continue working with CDPHE and CU Nursing, conduct quarterly analysis of SUD data.
- Produce a data collection tool to capture data, collected at the outset of our initiative with ongoing data collection (outcome metrics, organizational data, referral data, screening data, and demographic information).