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THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT SUICIDE AND OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEW

1

There is legislation for the Suicide and Overdose Fatality Review (SOFR) program.

SOFR legislation (IC 16-49.5) was signed into law March 18, 2020 and took effect July 1, 2020. The law outlines the purpose and structure of the local SOFR teams. It requires that all relevant reports (i.e. behavioral health reports) be made available to the local team, and that any reports that are acquired or produced by a SOFR team are not subject to subpoena/discovery or admissible as evidence in any administrative or judicial proceeding.

2

SOFR is largely modeled after child fatality review (CFR).

SOFR and CFR are county-led. This is in contrast with the Maternal Mortality Review program that has one state-level team. By keeping SOFR local, the reviews can lead to locally-informed recommendations.

3

The SOFR program is proven to be effective.

In 2018, the Indiana State Department of Health collaborated with the IU Fairbanks School of Public Health to conduct research on the effectiveness of opioid overdose fatality review in Indiana. The original pilot study consisted of four counties. Since 2018, SOFR teams have expanded to numerous counties, including: Allen, Clark, Dearborn, Delaware, Floyd, Grant, Hamilton, Howard, Jay, St. Joseph, Knox, Marion, Shelby, Starke, and Vanderburgh.

4

During SOFR, various local partners are engaged.

SOFR team members are required to bring relevant reports from their organizations to SOFR meetings. These team members typically include representatives from the coroner's office, law enforcement, hospital, behavioral health, etc. To provide the best possible recommendations, SOFR teams should bring together members with diverse perspectives and backgrounds.

5

SOFR accomplishes many goals through case review.

SOFR helps to: (1) identify missed opportunities for prevention in gaps in the system; (2) build working relationships between local stakeholders on overdose prevention; (3) recommend policies, programs, laws, etc. to prevent overdose deaths; (4) inform local overdose prevention strategies.

6

SOFR teams review suicide and overdose fatality cases.

There is significant overlap between overdose and suicide deaths in Indiana. Therefore, it helps to review both suicide and overdose cases to determine the larger behavioral health picture. To improve data quality, psychological autopsies (family/friend interviews) or family member interviews are increasingly used.

7

SOFR is not designed to place individual blame.

SOFR is not a peer review process or an opportunity to second guess agency policy or practice. It is about coming together as community leaders to determine where there were missed opportunities for prevention/intervention, and how, across all agencies, practices/procedures can be improved.

8

Once enough cases have been reviewed, the SOFR Team develops recommendations.

SOFR teams develop and implement recommendations based on data gleaned from case review. When a trend is found, teams go through the following steps: (1) Describe the problem and its context, (2) Choose long-term goals, (3) Identify key risk factors and protective factors, (4) Select or develop interventions, (5) Plan the evaluation, (6) Implement, evaluate and improve.

9

SOFR teams have already developed successful prevention initiatives.

In Hamilton County, the team improved emergency detention practices in hospital systems and broadened the use of the Columbia suicide screening tool with law enforcement. Additional SOFR successes include: expanding bereavement care services and educating the Department of Child Services on naloxone distribution (St. Joseph County); identifying the need for the inclusion of suicide cases in case review (Knox County).

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The SOFR program is serving as a national model for overdose fatality review (OFR).

In 2019, Indiana was chosen to be a national peer-to-peer leader in OFR, receiving funding and partnership from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As an OFR peer-to-peer leader, the SOFR program manager works with national partners to provide technical assistance to other states looking to implement an OFR. The SOFR program also serves as a peer mentor site through the Bureau of Justice Assistance and a pilot site for the new OFR database.

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