Social Service Administrators Can Use Public Health Data and Resources to Address Substance Use Disorders

Social service agency administrators are responsible for identifying an array of resources to serve youth and families. Also, these administrators are responsible for evaluating program effectiveness and ensuring equity. Their work is critical for youth and families involved in the juvenile and family justice system, as these families frequently have a complex set of needs. Currently, many communities are facing the adverse effects of the opioid crisis, including an increased number of newborns exposed to substances at birth. Social service administrators likely collect and use local substance use, treatment, and overdose data to understand the needs of their communities. However, it is important to also understand how local data compares to national public health data to make essential funding and development decisions. Below are five ways social service administrators can use a combination of data and other resources to improve policy and practice related to the ill effects of substance use disorders (SUDs). The list below is not exhaustive; instead, it serves as a starting point for social service administrators to better use the data and resources available.

01 Understanding the scope of the problem

As rates of SUDs increase throughout the nation, more children in the child welfare and juvenile justice system are exposed to drug use or engage in drug use themselves. For example, in 2018:

- 27,709 infants were referred to child protection service agencies with prenatal substance exposure.¹
- 360,895 children in the child welfare system had a caregiver with a drug abuse report.²
- 101,000 cases disposed of by juvenile courts involved drug law violations.³

To understand the scope of substance misuse locally and on a national level access the following public health data:

- Review Adoption Foster Care and Adoption Reporting System⁴ to understand the rates and main reasons children come into the child welfare system.
- Use the National Survey on Drug Use and Health⁵ to learn about the prevalence of SUDs on a national level.
- Access the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System⁶ to learn about the prevalence of self-reported substance use for youth in grades 9-12. Identified substance use by youth in the child welfare system may lead to crossover into the juvenile justice system. In addition, it is also important to use local data to identify pathways that lead to crossover from the child welfare system to the juvenile justice system.

¹ Adopting Foster Care and Adoption Reporting System
² National Survey on Drug Use and Health
³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System
Ensuring services are equitable

Social service administrators are responsible for evaluating service delivery in the child welfare system, which includes determining if services are equitable. Services must be accessible regardless of race and ethnicity. These services should also be culturally responsive and inclusive. Administrators can use locally collected data to first identify inequities and second to improve equity for youth and families. Begin by:

1. Collecting and reviewing data by demographics for congregate care, out-of-home placements, foster care, kinship care, arrests, diversions, petitions/ referrals to juvenile court, detention, etc.
2. Meet with staff and other stakeholders to discuss the aggregated data on a quarterly basis.
3. Discuss and change current practices that may be leading to inequities (if any). For example, review procedures related to placing youth in kinship care and determine if changes reduce the disproportionality of children placed in foster care.
4. Set benchmarks to reduce identified inequities by the next quarter. For example, set a benchmark to reduce congregate care placements by five percent.

Delivering ongoing training to reduce stigma related to substance use by caregiver

Coordinate education awareness campaigns for the public and training events for court stakeholders to reduce many of the stigmas that can prevent access to evidence-based substance use treatment. Myths about substance use and service delivery often interfere with receiving evidence-based treatment, visitation with children, finding available kinship care, and timely reunification. Administrators should ensure that fact-based information is disseminated on an ongoing basis. Social service administrators should use publicly available resources to provide current and reliable information to help improve outcomes for caregivers and children in the child welfare system.

- Address stigma by implementing Effective Strategies for Courtroom Advocacy on Drug Use and Parenting.7
- Use SAMHSA’s Medication-Assisted Treatment8 resources to dispel misinformation related to medication-assisted treatment (MAT).
- Use Legal Action Center MAT Advocacy Toolkit9 to address legal issues associated with denying access to MAT.
- Share the NCJFCJ’s Resolution Regarding Access to Medication-Assisted Treatment for Teens and Adults10 to gain buy-in from judicial stakeholders.

Encouraging accurate data collection

Encourage cross-system collaboration to consistently collect, share, and report data. Consider using resources to help jump start this collaboration and begin collecting and sharing data in a similar way:

- Center for Juvenile Justice Reform – Crossover Youth Practice Model11
- RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice – Dual Status Youth Reform12

In addition, encourage accurate data collection and timely submission to national data systems:

- Submit data to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System14 and the Adoption Foster Care and Adoption Reporting System,15 which will ensure that funding agencies have an accurate picture of the larger national needs.
- Encourage participation in the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program16 to ensure timelier overdose data.
Developing local resources

Consider working in collaboration with juvenile and family justice system stakeholders, including judges, prosecuting attorneys, public defenders, and probation departments to understand how youth and families with SUDs come into contact and move through the justice system. For example:

- Implement standards found in the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 that outline financial support for children who are placed with their parents in a substance use treatment placement.
- Use the Family-Based Residential Treatment Directory of Residential Substance Use Disorder: Treatment Programs for Parents with Children to identify programs that can treat parents and children.
- Refer to the National Practice Guideline for the Use of Medications in the Treatment of Addiction Involving Opioid Use to ensure that treatment service providers are following national guidelines.
- Sustain community resources and interventions by using a planning guide published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – A Sustainability Planning Guide for Health Communities.

Endnotes

2 Supra note 1.
5 National Survey on Drug Use and Health – http://pdas.samhsa.gov/
5 WAYS SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATORS CAN USE PUBLIC HEALTH DATA AND RESOURCES TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

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15 Supra note 4.


