



Massachusetts
 Middle District Attorney's Office
 Worcester County Regional Opioid Response

10/01/19 Grant Start → 09/30/22 Grant End

Overview

The Worcester County Regional Opioid Response will serve Worcester County, which is composed of 60 communities and a total of 830,000 residents. It is the largest of the Commonwealth's counties, bordering Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. At its center is Worcester, the second-largest city in New England. The project's resource center is located in Milford, with services available to surrounding towns. Massachusetts is ranked among the top ten states with the highest rates of drug overdose deaths involving opioids. There were 2,033 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2018. The overdose death rate in Massachusetts is 28.2 per 100,000 persons, double the national rate of 14.6. Opioid overdose deaths in the state declined annually from 2016 to 2018; however, there has been an extreme rise in the number of deaths involving synthetic opioids, mainly fentanyl. In 2012, there were 67 deaths involving synthetic opioids. In 2017, there were 1,649 deaths.

Worcester County's opioid fatalities have risen every year since 2008. In 2013, the county had 115 confirmed opioid overdose deaths. The provisional count for 2018 was 283. Illicit fentanyl use is a growing problem, which is contributing to the rising death toll. In the last three calendar years, the Middle District Attorney's Office saw fentanyl cases nearly triple.

Grant Focus

- Expand law enforcement diversion and first-responder models that connect individuals to substance abuse treatment and recovery support services.
- Employ the use of alternatives to incarceration programs for nonviolent drug offenders.
- Increase access to naloxone.

- Prioritize real-time data collection, analysis, and dissemination.
- Link data sets to identify trends and focus resources.
- Expand models of public health, behavioral health, and public safety information sharing and collaboration at state and local levels.
- Support children and youth affected by the opioid epidemic.
- Build capacity in underserved regions impacted by the opioid epidemic.
- Expand public awareness about opioid abuse.
- Educate public safety and criminal justice stakeholders about substance abuse.

Program Approach

Through the project, when a police department responds to an overdose call, a pager system will alert a clinical director, detectives, and members from Community Impact Inc., a community mental health counseling practice assigned to receive referrals and provide support. Other program referrals for at-risk individuals come from hospitals, treatment programs, and community outreach.

The project will:

- Establish a freestanding recovery center in Milford called “Chris’s Corner—The Recovery Resource Center,” which will support individuals and families facing the challenges of ongoing addiction recovery. Chris’s Corner will provide peer support, as well as education and advocacy opportunities, and work to remove barriers to recovery. The facility will offer a safe environment for peer-supported guidance.
- Implement the Critical Incident Management System (CIMS) for fatal and nonfatal overdoses. CIMS enables the use of real-time data for overdose victim follow-up.

- Create a Comfort Dog Pilot Program for those struggling with trauma, particularly children affected by substance use.

Clinicians will complete training at the University of Massachusetts Medical School—Child Trauma Training Center’s Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Intensive Learning Community to provide appropriate services to children affected by overdoses.

The project coordinator will educate other Worcester County communities about the regional approach in the Milford area and assist those interested in establishing similar programs. The coordinator will work with a community and schools outreach unit on prevention programming aimed to deter first use of opioids.

Project Partners

- Community Impact Inc.
- Central Massachusetts Opioid Task Force
- Regional Substance Navigation Program
 - Milford Police Department
 - Upton Police Department
 - Hopedale Police Department
 - Medway Police Department
 - Bellingham Police Department
 - Mendon Police Department

Contact Information

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