



BJA's
Comprehensive
 Opioid, Stimulant,
 and Substance Abuse
 Program



North Carolina
 Buncombe County Health and Human Services
 Safer Together

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

Overview

As the urban center for Western North Carolina in the Appalachian Mountain region, Buncombe County is becoming big business for private recovery centers that attract people from near and far. Emergency department data suggest that overdoses continue to rise, despite a small decline statewide. Buncombe County faces a higher burden of opioid overdoses because of the tourism and private rehabilitation market but has a fragmented system of care, with large chunks of service delivery missing. The two largest emergency response organizations—Buncombe County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the Asheville Fire Department (AFD)—do not offer follow-up services after an overdose, and the largest hospital system does not have the capacity to refer in-house to a peer support specialist for recovery support. Individuals seeking recovery via medication-assisted treatment (MAT) or addiction counseling are challenged by few outpatient-based opioid treatment programs. Community-based programs have practiced de facto case management for years, but this is unsustainable for lack of dedicated staff.

The three programs in Buncombe County that prescribe Suboxone to those with Medicaid or the uninsured have had to divert referrals for the uninsured because of the cost burden. Between 2015 and 2017, Buncombe County saw a 142 percent increase in overdose deaths attributed to opioids.

Grant Focus

- Expand law enforcement diversion and first-responder models that connect individuals to substance abuse treatment and recovery support services.
- Expand jail-based treatment and effective reentry programs.
- Expand peer support services and recovery housing.
- Increase access to naloxone.
- Prioritize real-time data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

- Link data sets to identify trends and focus resources.
- Build capacity in underserved regions impacted by the opioid epidemic.
- Educate public safety and criminal justice stakeholders about substance abuse.

Program Approach

Safer Together uses a post overdose response team (PORT) model, in combination with transitional housing slots and MAT, to:

- Reduce overdose deaths and overdose visits to the emergency department.
- Reduce the number of chronically homeless in the area.
- Provide peer support to individuals exiting jail.
- Provide in-home care to individuals with infectious disease when possible.
- Increase the acceptance of harm reduction, including MAT, among local law enforcement and medical personnel.

To accomplish Safer Together objectives, the program administrator oversees the following multifaceted strategies:

1. Nearly one-third of grant monies are dedicated to transitional housing for individuals leaving the jail or emergency department with opioid use disorder. These funds go to recovery housing programs that accept MAT. Priority is accorded to populations worst hit by the opioid use disorder epidemic, including individuals between the ages of 18 and 34; vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and victims of domestic violence; and individuals at high risk of arrest. Transportation is provided to MAT appointments and counseling.
2. PORT offers support to individuals who have experienced an overdose. The team receives referrals from EMS, the AFD, the Buncombe County

Sheriff's Office (BCSO), and local police departments to follow up within 72 hours of an overdose to offer services including case management, naloxone distribution and training, and substance use counseling.

3. Suboxone is provided, through a subaward to a comprehensive medical provider who offers MAT, to individuals who are uninsured or cannot afford a copay.
4. Safer Together incorporates information technology necessary for measuring the overdose epidemic in real time and connecting people to the right services. The Buncombe County Department of Health and Human Services, the BCSO, and EMS are implementing the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program (ODMAP). Grant funding is allocated for the purchase of software that allows agencies to input status updates on services they offer, making it easier for individuals and their families looking for help to narrow down their best and most accessible options.

Project Partners

- Buncombe County Sheriff's Office
- Vaya Health
- First at Blue Ridge
- Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministries
- Western North Carolina Community Health Services
- Western North Carolina AIDS Projects
- Mountain Area Health Education Center

Contact Information

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About BJA

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