



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



Washington
Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Program

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

Overview

Whatcom County is located in the northwestern tip of Washington State, and has one of the busiest Canada–U.S. border crossings in the country. For the fourth consecutive year, Whatcom County's population has continued to grow at a rate faster than that of Washington State. That growth and proximity to the border have contributed to negative impacts from the opioid crisis. In Whatcom County, there was a 38 percent increase in deaths involving any opioid between 2002 and 2004 and between 2015 and 2017, with 7.8 deaths per 100,000 residents per year between 2015 and 2017. Hospitalizations and emergency department admissions related to misuse of any opioids increased 70.8 percent between 2002 and 2004 and between 2013 and 2015, and there was a 214 percent increase in publicly funded first treatment admissions for heroin during the same period, with substantial increases in costs associated with hospitalizations. Whatcom County Drug Task Force operations recorded a 6,524 percent increase in synthetic

opiate seizures and a 348 percent increase in heroin seizures between 2009 and 2018. The Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office reported a 164 percent increase in opioid-specific felony cases between 2007 and 2017. Fifty-seven percent of those cases were repeat offenses for the same opioid-related charges, with some individuals having up to 13 different opioid possession/delivery-related cases.

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.
- 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.
- Expand public awareness about opioid abuse.
- Educate public safety and criminal justice stakeholders about substance abuse.

Program Approach

The Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program is a community-based diversion program designed to improve public safety and public order and reduce unnecessary justice system involvement for participants. Prosecutors and law enforcement work closely with case managers to ensure that all contacts with LEAD participants going forward, including new criminal prosecutions for other offenses, are coordinated with the service plan for participants to maximize the likelihood of behavioral change.

The Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (WCPAO) has contracted with Sea Mar Community Health Centers to provide clinical oversight and administrative duties to support the care coordination and case

management services of LEAD participants.

The WCPAO has partnered with elected officials, law enforcement, public defenders, mental health and drug treatment providers, housing providers, and other service agencies to find new ways to solve problems for individuals who frequently cycle in and out of the criminal justice system.

Project Partners

- Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Whatcom County Sheriff's Office
- Whatcom County Council
- Whatcom County Health Department
- Whatcom County Public Defender's Office
- City of Bellingham Mayor's Office
- City of Bellingham Attorney's Office
- City of Bellingham Police Department

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