



West Virginia

West Virginia Division of Justice and Community Services Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Site-Based Program

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

Overview

West Virginia has been severely affected by the opioid epidemic: Among other measures, its age-adjusted drug overdose death rate is more than 2½ times the 2017 national average. The state is struggling with a lack of economic growth, causing significant financial difficulties, and its rural, mountainous geography further isolates communities and residents from economic opportunity and services to combat substance abuse. In addition, the opioid epidemic has had a negative impact on the justice system at the state and county levels; West Virginia has the second-fastest growing prison population in the nation, causing prison and jail overcrowding. The West Virginia Division of Justice and Community Services (DJCS) has identified three populations for this project, focusing on statewide implementation, enhancement, and evaluation. The first will be children who experience trauma in their homes, schools, or communities. The second includes individuals suspected of committing recent narcotics and prostitution offenses. This aspect of the proposed project will focus heavily on Braxton, Calhoun, Clay, Gilmer, Webster, and Wirt counties, which

currently lack diversion-oriented programs that provide resources to reduce recidivism. The third population will be individuals who encounter the justice system through any number of paths—typically in-home confinement, parole, and other alternatives to incarceration.

Grant Focus

- Expand law enforcement diversion and first-responder models that connect individuals to substance abuse treatment and recovery support services.
- 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

The West Virginia DJCS project focuses on three primary target areas: early intervention and prevention, diversion, and evidence-based treatment. The state's Handle with Care (HWC) initiative will be expanded to (1) support children exposed to trauma and violence through improved collaboration among law enforcement, schools and child care agencies, and mental health providers; and (2) connect families, schools, and communities to mental health services. The West Virginia State Police will collaborate with schools, law enforcement agencies, and communities in all 55 counties through training and technical assistance regarding the HWC program.

Through the expansion and enhancement of the West Virginia Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program, counties that currently lack diversion programs will be able to support individuals who commit low-level, nonviolent, drug- and prostitution-related offenses with community-based substance abuse and behavioral health services, including case management, legal coordination, and other supportive services. Expanding the LEAD program in West Virginia will reduce recidivism and the associated costs by providing individuals with access to a case manager to help them with substance use treatment, housing, quality of life, psychological symptoms, interpersonal relationships, and health status. This aspect will focus on the counties of Braxton, Calhoun, Clay, Gilmer, Webster, and Wirt. The West Virginia LEAD programs have three primary purposes:

1. Improve public safety by reducing low-level criminal activity related to substance use.
2. Improve community health using treatment programs within West Virginia.
3. Reduce incarceration rates for low-level crime.

To decrease barriers to accessing the necessary services for opioid abuse and addiction treatment and recovery, the DJCS will expand telehealth services for those in

underserved and geographically isolated communities in Braxton, Calhoun, Clay, Gilmer, Webster, and Wirt counties. These services will include psychiatric evaluations with treatment plan development, individual and group counseling, cognitive-behavioral therapy, medication-assisted treatment (including buprenorphine and naltrexone), and peer recovery support services. The DJCS will provide ongoing training and technical assistance to these sites to mitigate their geographic isolation and to ensure access to treatment and recovery services.

These goals aim to reduce opioid abuse and mistreatment; increase services to an increasing number of justice-involved individuals with a history of opioid misuse and abuse; and decrease the financial strain the epidemic poses for individuals, communities, and the state.

Project Partners

- West Virginia Office of Research and Strategic Planning
- West Virginia Office of Drug Control Policy
- West Virginia Bureau of Behavioral Health
- West Virginia State Police
- Braxton, Calhoun, Clay, Gilmer, Webster, and Wirt counties

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