

Beaver County, Pennsylvania, Behavioral Health: Collaboration Produces Results

In Beaver County, Pennsylvania, accidental overdose deaths increased by 240 percent from 2014 to 2016, and more than 600 naloxone reversals were reported in 2016. In response, in 2017 the [Beaver County Behavioral Health and Developmental Services \(BCBH\)](#) received a Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Program (COAP), a predecessor to COSSAP, grant known as “Let Us Know—We Can Help” (Let Us Know). The name reflected BCBH’s desire to gather and disseminate helpful data and provide education to individuals addressing the opioid epidemic in their professional and/or personal lives.

The Let Us Know project was used to expand upon a 2009 grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance that resulted in the Beaver County Sequential Intercept Model (SIM). This enhancement enabled BCBH team members to participate in a program with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s GAINS Center to formally update the SIM. A collaborative group of Beaver County professionals from all spectrums of behavioral health and criminal justice systems participated in reviewing the county’s SIM with the assistance from the GAINS Center and was able to update intercepts 1–5 as well as add intercept 0 (visit [this link](#) for more information on the SIM model).

In addition to the technical assistance it received, the enhancement provided BCBH with an opportunity to develop new—and strengthen existing—relationships within the community. Over the following four years, information was gathered, analyzed, and shared to enhance efforts to decrease overdose rates in Beaver County.

From the outset, the project benefited from strong collaboration across the county, thanks to the dedicated



involvement of the [Beaver County Drug Abuse Coalition](#).

The coalition brought together stakeholders, including service providers, county leaders, representatives from the legal and healthcare systems, and individuals with lived experience. In addition, the participation of the county coroner’s office, emergency medical services, and the district attorney’s office generated new data and real-time anecdotal information, lending the project additional credibility.

Critically, throughout the project period, data was shared with groups that had not previously received them, such as the county police chiefs and probation department, substance use disorder and mental health service providers, and parents whose children attended area schools.

In an effort to determine where gaps continued to exist within community outreach, multiple community and

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targeted sub-group surveys were disseminated. The surveys were completed by stakeholders, first responders, student assistance professionals, youth ambassadors, and community members. Results were used to create educational and outreach materials addressing stigma to inform policies and programs in the county and to improve current grant activities.

Educational outreach about overdose symptoms and how to use Narcan was well received at neighborhood events. Training was provided to behavioral health, employment, and housing authority staff members, church groups, hotel staff members, police academy cadets, school personnel, students, and community members with a total of nearly 1,000 people trained. A partnership was established with the local hospital to provide additional Narcan outreach to the community at a local library.

The project also measured levels of stigma around substance use over time and implemented a billboard campaign to raise awareness about and refer individuals to the [System of Care](#) and the [Dear Mind](#) websites for resources. In addition, a video outlining community resources was developed for family members to view in the waiting area of the Beaver County Jail during visitation.

The project did face challenges, many of them caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced project leaders to marshal resources and creativity to continue grant functions while handling new and unprecedented demands. Meetings, presentations, and outreach efforts moved to virtual formats, which decreased participation somewhat—particularly for Narcan outreach programs.

Another challenge involved obtaining county data from the state's prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP). Once the data was received, the project began work with local pharmacies to ease their ongoing engagement with the

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PDMP. A retired pharmacist was recruited to assist with this effort, but delays still resulted. For that reason and due to impacts of the pandemic, the project received an extension.

Collaboration was the key to the success of the Let Us Know project. Including representation from as many areas as possible is recommended to any community looking to implement similar projects, as is persistence. People are busy and have other priorities. Gentle and professional persistence can be helpful. In addition, be open to problem-solving. Sometimes we can't get what we ask for, but we can get what we need with some compromise. Stay focused on the mission—your efforts are important!

By the conclusion of the grant period, the outcome was clear: the overall commitment, engagement, and effort of the individuals and programs involved resulted in a highly successful project in Beaver County. Based on EMS calls for the first half of 2021, overdoses were down 31 percent compared to the first six months in 2020. The number of fatal overdoses stayed roughly the same from 2020 to 2021, but there was an increase in overdose deaths caused by stimulants. Fentanyl was present in over 90 percent of all fatal overdoses in 2021. Following the billboard campaign, traffic to the Dear Mind website increased over 170 percent. The number of page visits increased from 93 to 301, and progressions to different pages increased dramatically from 138 to 579. The enhancements and expansions produced by the COAP grant will be continued.