

# Whatcom County

## Opioid Abuse

### Prevention & Response Plan



*Prepared by the Whatcom County Health Department on  
Behalf of **Whatcom has HOPE***

March 2017

## INTRODUCTION

On September 6, 2016, twenty-seven stakeholders in Whatcom County met to discuss the growing concerns around opioid misuse and abuse. A number of topics were explored, including:

- *Current local efforts focused on opioid abuse*
- *Identification of services and programs that could be reinforced or better coordinated*
- *New strategies that could address unmet needs*
- *Existing and needed resources that could support a collective response*

Concerns from that meeting were concentrated in multiple areas. This document captures some of the early work stemming from this meeting and from workgroups that have been subsequently formed. This paper is intended to serve as a living document that will continue to evolve as stakeholders endeavor to meet the ongoing needs of the community.

## BACKGROUND

Prescription opiate and heroin abuse continues to be a significant problem nationally, as well as within Washington State. Research has shown that 4 out of 5 heroin users began first with non-medical use of prescription pain relievers, and nearly half of young people who inject heroin start by abusing prescription drugs.

Whatcom County continues to experience these issues. In fact, local data has shown:

- Rates of admission to substance use disorder treatment for opiate abuse have significantly grown in the past five years
- The demographics of visitors attending the Syringe Services Program (SSP) in Whatcom County have shifted to younger ages, with 18-24 being a primary recipient of services
- Nearly 10% of Whatcom County 12<sup>th</sup> grade students reporting using prescription drugs not prescribed to them in the past 30 days
- More than 2 out of 3 (66%) adults surveyed in a recent Whatcom County survey indicated they felt prescription drugs were a “moderate to serious” problem for youth
- 78% of Whatcom County adults felt that youth have a “high risk” for harming themselves if they use medication without a prescription or in a way other than prescribed
- 47% of adults indicated they did not know where to dispose of prescription drugs
- Only 4 in 10 adults have talked to youth about the risks of harm from using prescription drugs not prescribed to them in the past three months

These are only a few examples of the challenges Whatcom County continues to face. Abuse of opioids continues to contribute to emergency room visits, jail incarcerations, and other costly community resources. Local concerns repeatedly focused on easy accessibility of pharmaceutical medications, as well as a lack of perceived harm from their use or their potential for abuse.

## PARTNERSHIP

Partnership is a critical component of this collaborative effort. Each work group has dedicated time to identifying the stakeholders necessary to implement successful strategies. Coordinated

recruitment of additional key partners will be an ongoing effort. As of February 22, 2017, twenty-eight individuals have participated in initial planning efforts on a designated work group, representing fifteen different entities. Representation has included, but is not limited to:

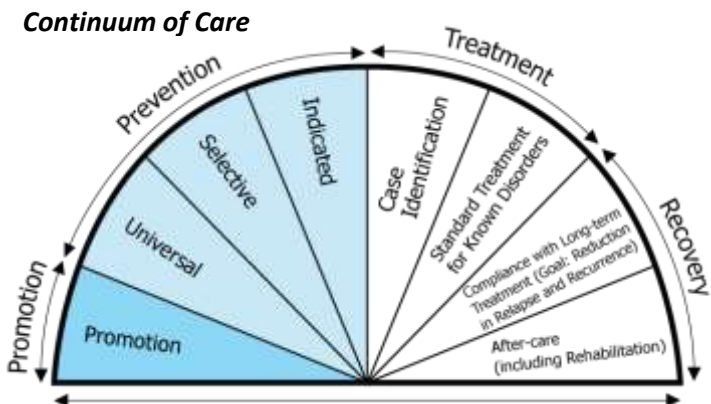
1. Bellingham School District
2. Bellingham Police Department
3. City of Bellingham
4. Chuckanut Health Foundation
5. Northwest Youth Services
6. PeaceHealth
7. Parents Matter
8. Phoenix Recovery
9. SpicerDent Productions
10. Valley Drug
11. Unity Care Northwest
12. W.C. Health Dept.
13. W.C. Public Defender's Office
14. W.C. Sheriff's Office
15. Whatcom Family & Community Network
16. Whatcom Medical Society

Additional stakeholders participated in the September meeting and are still being provided with updates and opportunities to participate. Local materials that are developed from these efforts will be marked with "Whatcom has HOPE (**H**eroin and other **O**piate **P**revention & **E**ducation)," which represents the collective efforts of these partners.

**STRATEGIES**

*Substance Use:*

Whatcom County currently possesses a number of programs and services that are designed to serve individuals with prevention, intervention, treatment, and aftercare services. These include school-based and community-based services that are delivered on a Continuum of Care. These services are designed to prevent abuse from starting, support those needing intervention or treatment services, and to support recovery. These services provide a foundation that addresses all forms of substance abuse and addictions. While this document outlines some strategies that can be implemented in direct response to opioid issues, it is also critical to provide ongoing support of the systems that create a comprehensive continuum of care.

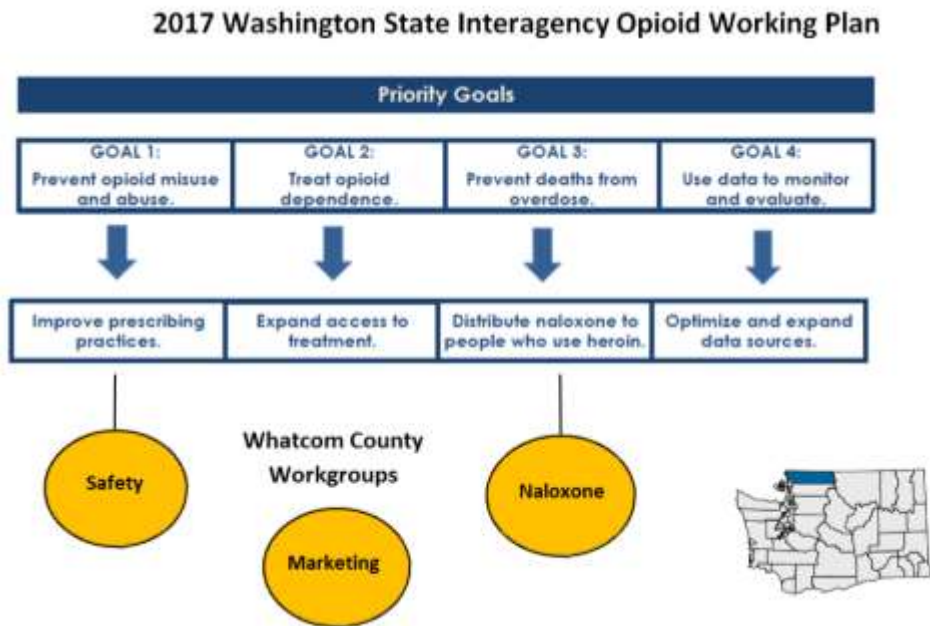


*Opioid Abuse:*

In response to growing concerns directly related to opioids, local stakeholders have been engaged in strategic planning to respond to the crisis. This collaborative approach developed into three separate workgroups, each having identified strategies to implement locally. In part, the **SAFETY** workgroup

focuses on preventing opioid misuse and abuse by addressing issues of securing, monitoring, and disposing of unused medications. The **NALOXONE** workgroup focuses on preventing overdose by educating about how to use and where to access naloxone (overdose reversing medication), as well as the Good Samaritan Law (protections from civil liabilities when trying to help in a medical emergency). The **MARKETING** workgroup currently serves as the hub of all media and marketing messaging, ensuring effective coordination of efforts.

Whatcom County has identified local objectives that support the Washington State Interagency Opioid Working Plan. Although individuals and agencies in Whatcom County actively participate in state and regional efforts that address all four state goals, the Whatcom County workgroups primarily focus on two state goals that were identified as ‘locally actionable.’ Efforts around prescribing practices, expansion of treatment services, evaluation, and other important efforts will continue to be supported by local partners, at the state level. The following graphic illustrates the state’s plan, and how Whatcom County workgroups specifically connect to state goals.



Stakeholder and workgroups meetings created an opportunity to review and analyze local data in-depth, driving the process of identifying needs and potential strategies that could be implemented in Whatcom County. The following plan was developed as the starting point for a comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing public health issues related to opioid misuse and abuse in the community.

## **SAFETY**

*State Goal 1: Prevent opioid misuse and abuse.*

**Objective 1.1:** Create a “Medicine Inventory tool” that Whatcom County residents can use to monitor and track their medications.

**Objective 1.2:** Acquire and distribute medicine lock bags/boxes to Whatcom County residents.

- Objective 1.3:** Convene stakeholders that will work to research and review potential for a local Stewardship Ordinance (reverse-distributor process for drug disposal).
- Objective 1.4:** Increase public awareness through appropriate messaging, including:
  - a) Secure your medications (lock them up)
  - b) Monitor your medications
  - c) Properly dispose of unwanted, unneeded medications (promote Take Back sites)

## MARKETING

*Addresses multiple goals and strategies identified in the state plan.*

- Objective 2.1:** Coordinate efforts between workgroups to deliver a comprehensive marketing plan.
- Objective 2.2:** Increase public awareness through appropriate messaging, including:
  - a) Increase the awareness of harms of prescription drug abuse, as well as prevalence of abuse.
  - b) Reduce stigma around addictions while increasing awareness that prescription drugs can lead to addiction (i.e., it can happen to anyone).
  - c) Promote appropriate use of prescription drugs, as well as alternatives to pain management.
  - d) Promote the importance of adults talking to children about the harms of using medications inappropriately, or medications not prescribed to them.

## NALOXONE

*State Goal 3: Prevent deaths from overdose.*

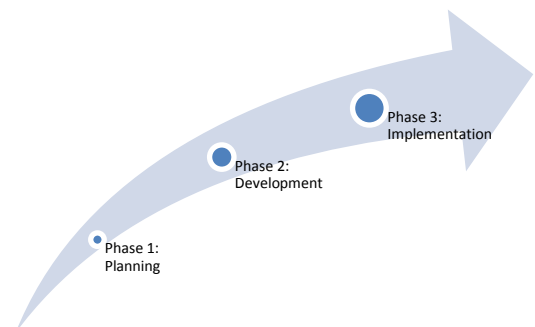
- Objective 3.1:** Develop Naloxone policy standards for agencies to adopt and encourage securing kits.
- Objective 3.2:** Create an inventory of Naloxone carriers/distributors.
- Objective 3.3:** Identify access gaps to Naloxone in the county.
- Objective 3.4:** Recruit additional pharmacies to carry Naloxone for public access.
- Objective 3.5:** Secure Naloxone for time-limited distribution.
- Objective 3.6:** Increase public awareness through appropriate messaging, including:
  - a) Promote the Good Samaritan Law.
  - b) Educate about proper Naloxone use and access.

Workgroups will continue to refine their action plans through the planning and implementation process, and will be able to scale efforts as resources are available.

## IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION

Implementation of the project will be done in three phases, including planning, development, and implementation. Each workgroup will establish action steps and timelines for each strategy to be delivered.

Evaluation of efforts will be identified by each workgroup, and may include the data collection of output and outcome data, collected through either a



quantitative or qualitative process. Aside from project specific measures, ongoing data sources in the community will be reviewed to track ongoing opioid abuse impacts. This will include the annual Community Adult Survey, the Healthy Youth Survey administered every two years, and other community indicators (treatment admissions, arrest records, emergency room visits, etc.).

## **RESOURCES**

State and federal resource currently provide some useful tools and information. Whatcom County will work to promote these available resources to support identified local needs. A sample of these resources includes, but is not limited to:

**Stopoverdose.org** <http://stopoverdose.org/>

**Partnership for Drug-Free Kids** <http://www.drugfree.org/>

**Take back your meds** <http://www.takebackyourmeds.org/>

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*We acknowledge there are many other agencies, programs, and services that are working on reducing issues associated with opioid abuse. This is not an exhaustive list of efforts in Whatcom County, but does represent some collaborative work being coordinated to establish a collective impact. We thank all that have been involved in this process, and others that will be in the future. If you would like more information, contact the Whatcom County Health Department at 360-778-6002.*