

OFFICE OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND ADDICTION PREVENTION

STATE OF ALASKA, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES, DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Alaska Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention, established in July of 2017, uses a public health approach to prevent and reduce substance use disorders, prevent harms caused by substance use and support community-based activities across Alaska. Our services protect life, health and safety of Alaskans. As a team of eight public health professionals and two support staff, we focus largely on strengthening the essential public health infrastructure, services, systems and partnerships across Alaska. Current activities are focused on opioid and marijuana misuse and addiction prevention, data and evaluation, including program and systems changes to mitigate harms.

The principles of public health provide a useful framework for understanding and addressing the causes and consequences of substance misuse and addiction. Prevention occurs through upstream prevention programs, policy interventions, misuse and harms prevention, as well as community focused interventions. We provide collaborative leadership to plan, develop and implement evidence-informed interventions and knowledge. By providing Alaskans and their communities with the best available knowledge on substance use and addiction, we assist individual Alaskans, health professionals and other community leaders in a coordinated response. We work to promote safe and healthy communities.

Mission

Implement public health approaches to prevent and reduce substance use disorders and support community-based activities across Alaska.

Core values

Community engagement, communication and collaboration



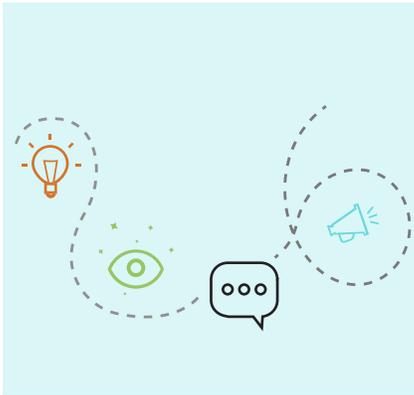
Community meetings and outreach inform plans to address opioid challenges in Alaska.



Through an established partnership, collaborations with members of the Alaska National Guard's Counterdrug Support Program further the reach of prevention efforts.

CORE VALUES IN ACTION

The Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention's core values of community engagement, communication and collaboration are the guiding principles to ensure efforts resonate with Alaskans and empower communities to address and advance prevention work. The following are examples of how we practice our core values in our work.



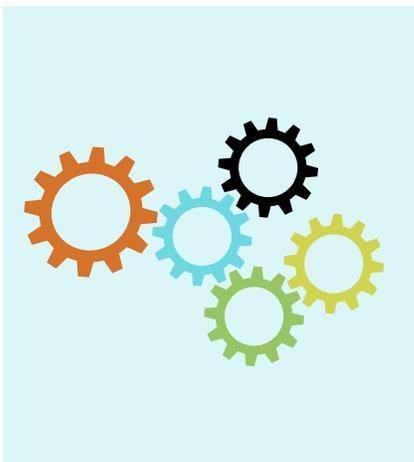
Community engagement

The office engaged individuals, families and communities, including professional communities, statewide, to learn how opioids and other substances impact Alaskans. Alongside partners, the office visited 15 communities and listened to personal and professional input from at least 300 Alaskans. A professional community summit in August 2018 convened in coordination with the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the Alaska Mental Health Trust and other State of Alaska agencies. It brought together nearly 100 Alaskans from over 80 agencies and organizations to build a plan to align State activities with community needs.



Communication

While the office has initiated many high-profile campaigns to inform Alaskans and health professionals about subjects such as careful opioid prescribing, non-opioid pain management and responsible use of marijuana, some of its most critical communication occurs through timely access to data. The need for timely, comprehensive data is paramount to understanding the evolution of substance use and misuse in Alaska. In order respond to substance use threats, stakeholders need access to current data trends, hospitalization and death data, as well as the measurable impacts of prevention strategies employed. [Alaska's Opioid Data Dashboard](#), as an example, is updated regularly to provide an easy-to-navigate interactive platform for stakeholders to monitor trends in Alaska.



Collaboration

To support cross-collaborative medical provider engagement and learning on opioid prescribing and treatment, the office, in collaboration with the Division of Behavioral Health, convened a partnership between major Alaskan healthcare stakeholders. Many partners were involved in *Project ECHO on Opioids*, with experts from organizations including Providence Alaska Medical Center, Alaska Native Tribal Health System, University of Alaska Anchorage, Alaska Primary Care Association. *Project ECHO* is an online education practice model adopted in many states to connect primary care physicians with a team of specialists on regular video calls, providing a space to discuss specific medical topics and cases. It facilitates a professional support network across Alaska, including remote communities.

WHAT WE DO

There is no one solution or intervention that will single-handedly heal Alaska's communities from the devastating effects of substance misuse. Outlined below are prevention, treatment and recovery health interventions that occur at the individual, family, community and societal level. The Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention's public health approach includes a range of strategies to support communities in reversing the most harmful impacts, support healing and build resiliency.

Upstream prevention

Promote wellness and build resiliency along Alaskans' lifespan by addressing [social determinants of health](#) in an effort to minimize health disparities.

Misuse prevention

Reduce and prevent substance misuse behaviors using evidence-based strategies with fidelity before problem substance use arises.

Harm prevention

Reduce and prevent substance misuse and addiction related harms such as overdose, impaired driving and infectious disease.

Treatment

Enhance access to treatment through workforce development and training.

Recovery

Build supportive and resilient communities suited to support Alaskans in recovery.

The office operates as a supportive partner, in alignment and coordination with Division of Behavioral Health, which leads these topic areas



Individual

Supportive resources and information to improve individual wellness.



Interpersonal

Quality, social and relationship-based approaches to improve wellness.



Community

Strategies and build infrastructure to improve wellness.



Societal

Support social and cultural factors, and policies, that improve wellness.

Recent initiatives, charted below, highlight the work, the purpose for each prevention initiative and the types of social environments the activity directly supports.

	Statewide planning and coordination	Collect, analyze and share data	Wellness coalition support	Empower Alaskans to make informed choices	Medical provider-to-provider education activities
<p>Upstream prevention</p> <p>Promote wellness and build resiliency along Alaskans' lifespan by addressing social determinants of health in an effort to minimize health disparities.</p>	Assess and plan for substance misuse and addiction response in coordination with stakeholders.	Provide informational resources for program planning and strategic response.	Support community coalitions in providing quality local-level public health response.	Health information campaigns, resources and tools to promote health literacy.	In-person and virtual meetings to improve practice related to opioids and improve Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders diagnoses.
<p>Misuse prevention</p> <p>Reduce and prevent substance misuse behaviors using evidence-based strategies with fidelity before problem substance use arises.</p>					
<p>Harm prevention</p> <p>Reduce and prevent substance misuse and addiction related harms such as overdose, impaired driving and infectious disease.</p>					
<p>Treatment</p> <p>In alignment and coordination with the Division of Behavioral Health, enhance access to treatment through workforce development and training.</p>					
<p>Recovery</p> <p>In alignment and coordination with the Division of Behavioral Health, build supportive and resilient communities suited to support Alaskans in recovery.</p>					



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Participant-led continuing education modules	Afterschool programs	Education systems supports to address youth risks	Build leadership skills and support connectedness for justice-involved youth	Reduce and reverse opioid overdose	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders family and workforce skill development	Safe medication disposal
Online-based learning modules to support a trained response workforce statewide.	Fund afterschool programs. Afterschool programs serve as a protective factor to prevent youth substance use.	Support alternative school coalition serving at-risk youth.	Provide funds to the Division of Juvenile Justice to reduce youth recidivism.	Provide naloxone and overdose rescue training through Project HOPE.	Family education and professional workforce development.	Enhance community access to medication disposal bags, aimed to prevent opioid misuse.

HIGHLIGHTED ACTIVITIES

Project HOPE — building community connectedness

While Project HOPE is most known for distributing opioid overdose response kits containing naloxone (Narcan® Nasal Spray), documented to have reversed 300 overdoses in Alaska, it also serves as a unique mechanism for building connectedness in our communities. The program convenes individuals, community organizations and leaders who want to build stronger communities. Since the project started in 2017, 108 community partners have distributed 24,692 kits.

Compassionate communication in high stress situations

Trauma, at both an individual and community level, can be a barrier to achieving community health. The way we communicate to individuals who have experienced trauma matters, as does the resiliency in the workforce responding to substance use in high stress situations. The office worked with Southcentral Foundation to provide a training on compassionate communication in high stress situations. The training, Core Concepts, was offered to 300 professionals on the frontlines of Alaska substance use response.

Creating supportive environments for families affected by FASD

The office is helping individuals, families and communities affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) thrive by providing an avenue for engaging in improvement of their community support systems. These systems can include schools, healthcare, public safety and the courts. “When caregivers, including parents of all kinds (biological, foster, adoptive and grand), of children affected by prenatal alcohol exposure receive respect for their experience and increased support to learn skills to educate their children, magic happens,” Deb Evensen, Alaska-based FASD education consultant.

Streamlining continuing education for providers

Alaska legislation requires prescribers with a license to prescribe controlled substances complete two hours of continuing education on addiction, opioid use and pain management. [The office developed a course](#) in response to this requirement. The course has delivered over 900 hours of provider continuing education engagement, and the office continues to build a library of continuing education resources for healthcare professionals with Alaska-specific information.



MSgt Jennifer Theulen and A1C Lauren Scanlan at the office

On the same team

The Alaska National Guard Counterdrug Support Program is a component of the National Guard that supports law enforcement, community-based organizations, and other agencies with effective ways of combating the negative effects of drugs in our community.

Since 2017, the Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention collaborated with the program on prevention efforts. Through an established agreement, members MSgt Jennifer Theulen, SSG Elijah Gutierrez, A1C Lauren Scanlan, work alongside members of the office to support synergy among state and local agencies.

FUNDING SOURCES AND BUDGET ALLOCATION

Financial costs of substance misuse and addiction in Alaska

The recently released 2019 McDowell Group report, [“The Economic Costs of Substance Misuse.”](#) estimates costs of substance-use disorders—borne by state and local governments, employers, and residents of Alaska— which totaled \$3.45 billion annually. Approximately \$2.39 billion (69% of total costs) were due to alcohol misuse; the remaining \$1.06 billion (31%) were associated with drug misuse. The majority of these costs (a total of 71%) are linked to health care (\$1.3 billion) and productivity losses (\$1.1 billion). The criminal justice and protective services cost to Alaska for issues created by drug and alcohol misuse has been documented at \$659 million dollars a

year. The costs of addiction are more than financial. Addressing the effects of addiction can reduce societal costs, as well.

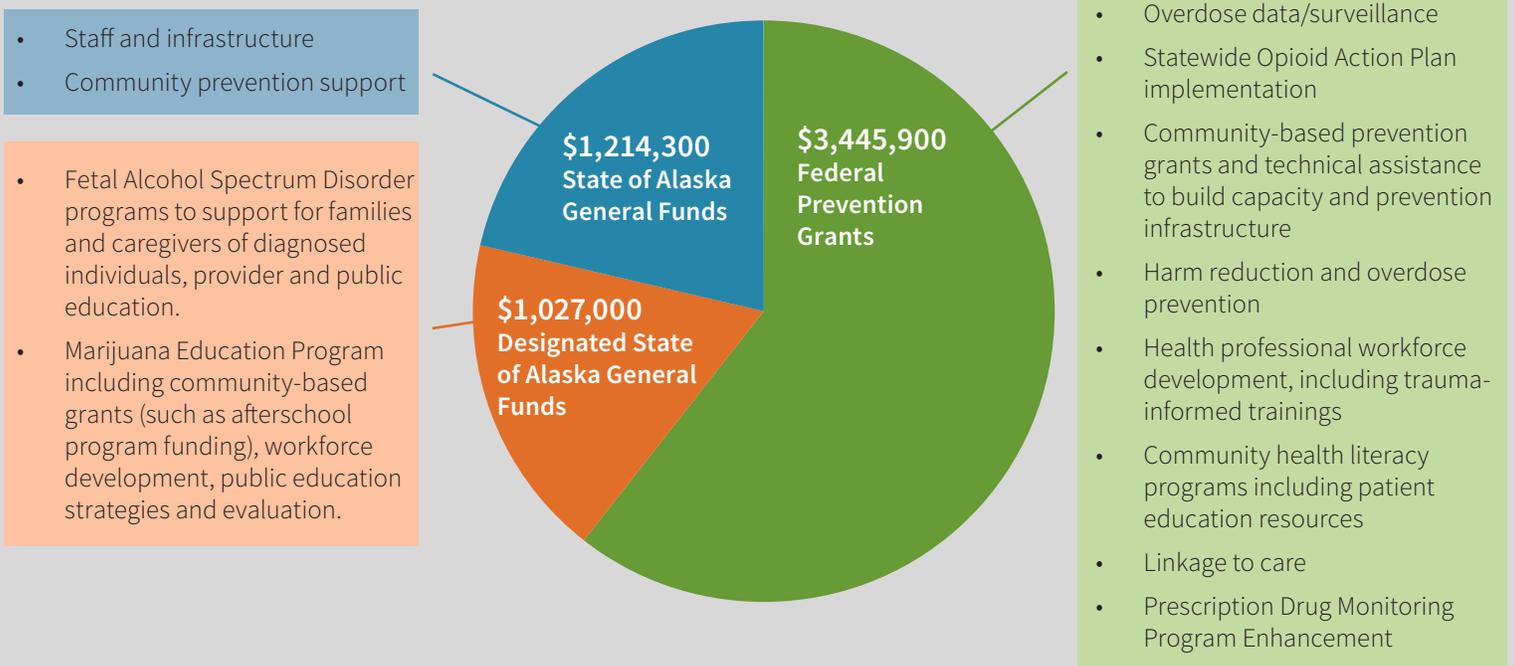
During 2010 to 2017 the opioid overdose death rate in Alaska increased 77%. We believe our prevention efforts are having a positive impact as opioid overdose deaths decreased by 36% during 2017 to 2018. However, preliminary 2019 data shows the opioid overdose death rate may again be on the rise. It is clear this is not an issue that will be solved in a matter of years, but will likely take decades of prevention efforts similar to other public health epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

Economic costs to Alaska are estimated at:

- **\$3.45 billion in costs to Alaska**
- **\$1.1 billion in productivity loss**
- **\$659 million in criminal justice and protective service costs**

(Source: 2019 McDowell Group report, *Economic Cost of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Alaska*)

Budget for state fiscal year 2019



MOVING FORWARD

In addition to maintaining current programs and activities, the Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention will engage in several new efforts in 2020.

Reviewing overdose cases in Alaska

The office operates the Drug Overdose Death Review Committee to systematically review drug overdose deaths in the state of Alaska using. This model aims to identify specific points of intervention and prevention to inform future policies, programs and other prevention efforts.

Partnering with the Department of Corrections to prevent overdose

Project HOPE is partnering with the Department of Corrections to distribute narcan kits. This effort is intended to reduce the risk of overdose death for inmates re-entering their community.

Engaging Alaska employers

A resource guide for Alaska employers will soon be available to better develop workplace skills to address organizational health and employee well-being as it relates to substance use. It will include basics about substance misuse prevention, treatment and recovery in workplaces, and will be promoted among Alaska's diverse industry sectors.

Collaborating to support improved care

A collaboration with the Section of Public Health Nursing provides an opportunity for coordinated community-centered approaches to reduce harms related to substance use. Three public health nurses are being funded to support these prevention efforts.

Through a collaborative effort with the Division of Behavioral Health, a web-based platform, Open Beds, is being implemented. The platform will support treatment location services for individuals, hospitals and other social service providers.

Developing approaches to address shared risk and protective factors

Focusing on factors that are shared across multiple health concerns allows prevention efforts to efficiently address health issues. The office applies a shared risk and protective factor approach in the development and implementation of strategies to reduce substance use/misuse, and their associated harms.

- Funding was allocated to support afterschool programs statewide to build protective factors related to substance misuse among youth in grades 5-8.
- Resources to support school districts to deliver targeted trauma-engaged prevention activities to at-risk students to improve behavioral health issues.



Map showing the communities where marijuana tax dollars provided funds for afterschool programs, a strategy to improve social determinants of health in Alaska.



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