



The Opioid Epidemic: You Spoke, We Continue to Listen

In January 2022, we listened to Wisconsinites explain the profound impact of the opioid epidemic and share potential strategies to save lives. We gathered big-picture input from a broad group of people to inform our plan for future opioid settlement funds. In early 2023, we returned to Wisconsinites with a request to prioritize the strategies heard in 2022 and again Wisconsin responded with powerful messages. Using the themes identified in 2022 (root causes, prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery), we asked Wisconsinites to rank strategies for 2023.

Survey respondents included 4,181 people representing all tribal nations and counties in Wisconsin, people who work in prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, first responder, law enforcement, children and family services, and/or people who have personal, lived experience with their own or their loved one's substance use disorder.

Ongoing Message from Wisconsinites:

Invest across the continuum, from prevention to recovery.



Address Root Causes

- 1 Improve Mental Health.** Mental health and access to mental health services are clearly linked to substance use. Increase the number of mental health providers and services and the ability to afford them.
- 2 Focus on the conditions in the environment where people live, work, and play.** Focus on things like safe and affordable housing, access to affordable health care, a livable wage, an environment free from discrimination, etc., as they are critical to preventing, treating, and recovering from a substance use disorder.
- 3 Reduce adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma.** Trauma, in all its forms is a significant underlying contributor to substance use behaviors. Preventing and healing from trauma must be part of any long-term solution frameworks.



Prevent Proactively

- 1 Educate children and youth.** Provide evidence-based education to K-12 school-aged kids, either within their school, community, and/or directly with families. Include the voices of individuals with lived experience, empowering them and making it more "real" for students.
- 2 Educate the public and reduce stigma.** Educate the community in evidence-based, proven ways and directly focus on the stigma that often prevents people from seeking help. Involve those with lived experience and their families in that process.



Enhance Harm Reduction

- 1 Naloxone/Narcan®.** Increase the availability of medications such as naloxone and Narcan® and training on how to use them. Make them free and widely accessible.
- 2 Fentanyl Test Strips.** Provide fentanyl test strips widely at no cost from locations that are accessible 24/7.
- 3 Syringe Services Programs.** Provide opportunities for people to safely dispose of used syringes and obtain sterile syringes to prevent disease and increase trust, testing, and treatment awareness.



Expand Treatment Options

- 1 Directly fund equitable treatment options.** Directly fund treatment at all levels, health care, in-home care, and/or mental healthcare for individuals struggling with substance use disorder who cannot afford treatment or have no/insufficient insurance. Establish facilities equitably, ensuring that some serve non-English speakers and establish a presence in rural counties.
- 2 Reframe and Expand Medication-Assisted Therapy (MAT).** Reframe the way that MAT is discussed to reduce stigma. Increase access to MAT, including mobile MAT units, and providing MAT in homeless shelters and jails.
- 3 Strengthen and diversify the workforce.** Increase the number and diversity of staff who work in substance use disorder and mental health. Provide training and education to existing providers to prevent substance misuse and identify and treat substance use and mental health disorders.



Support Recovery

- 1 Long-term transitional housing.** Increase the number of and affordability of transitional housing, recovery housing, and/or sober living facilities. Ensure these facilities provide at least 6-12 months or more of wraparound services/support and that they do not have overly stringent non-relapse policies. Ensure some of those options facilitate housing for families.
- 2 Build social support systems.** Build social support programs focused on individuals struggling with substance use, as well as their families (e.g., training family members, creating hotlines, programs like GRASP or GROUPS, peer counselors, home-based nurse-family partnership, treatment based in home communities, etc.).
- 3 Empower those with lived experience to help create solutions.** Empower individuals in recovery as well as surviving family members to be a vital part of the solution. For example, employ more of them as recovery coaches or peer supports, and invest in their substance use disorder focused organizations.
- 4 Support child survivors.** Support child survivors who lost a primary caregiver to substance use disorder. Children who have lost a parent or primary caregiver to substance use are more likely to experience instability and substance use themselves. Support these children financially, and/or with solutions like healthcare coverage, social work support, and preventive education and services.

More information available:

[Wisconsin's Opioid Settlement Funds](#)

[Opioid and Overdose Prevention Resources](#)

