



REDUCING STIGMA TO IMPROVE CARE IN KENTUCKY

Started in 2018, the Northeast Kentucky Substance Use Response Coalition's member organizations work together to provide educational, clinical and preventive interventions that directly impact the opioid and substance use crisis across 19 counties.

Three member organizations, UK St. Claire hospital, the Northeast Kentucky Area Health Education Center and the Gateway District Health Department, worked on this pilot project to test Overdose Measures Matter (OMM) indicators.

Nearly everyone in the region has been affected by addiction. The coalition has implemented a broad range of programs including jail re-entry, medical provider training and youth prevention to address substance use prevention, treatment and recovery. Stigma toward those experiencing substance use disorder remains prevalent.

The coalition used OMM to learn more about stigma and identify community-responsive strategies to address biases and improve care.

USING OMM INDICATORS TO REDUCE BARRIERS TO CARE



COLLECTING DATA

The Northeast Kentucky Substance Use Response Coalition worked with subject matter experts to develop surveys to collect data on six indicators. Through the health department's syringe exchange program (SEP), people with lived and living experience (PWLE) were surveyed on three OMM indicators. Other partners surveyed emergency department staff, local coroners and first responders using three additional indicators.

Indicators used for surveys administered at the health department SEP:

- [Number of fentanyl test strips distributed](#)
- [Percent of care-seeking people who use drugs \(PWUD\) who reported that supplementary program-provided supports increased their access to care](#)
- [Number and description of prevention activities, interventions, and/or policies resulting from multi-sector partnerships](#)

Indicators used for surveys administered with other coalition partners:

- [Assessment of the continuum of care for people who use drugs \(PWUD\) who enter the local emergency department](#)
- [Perceived stigma towards people who use drugs among first responders](#)
- Assessment of protocols used by local coroners to determine drug overdose deaths*

**This indicator is not from the OMM site—the coalition developed it for local use.*



UNCOVERING STIGMA

Survey results revealed negative attitudes, lack of knowledge and misinformation about PWLLE served by first responders in a three-county region. These findings demonstrated a great need for further education about stigma for first responders and others in the region.



During the project planning, the coalition uncovered some of their own biases and quickly changed their data collection plan to ensure that PWLLE were treated equitably.



FILLING CRITICAL GAPS IN SERVICE

Findings from assessing the continuum of care for PWUD who enter the emergency department revealed that most emergency department substance use disorder encounters occurred overnight. However, the local peer recovery program only operated during daytime hours—revealing a meaningful gap in care for PWUD at a crucial time. UK St. Claire and a local recovery community organization are now taking steps to fund multiple peer support specialists on an around-the-clock basis.



PRIORITIZING PWLLE

In three years, UK St. Claire has added more than 50 people with lived and living experiences with substance use disorder to their hospital system staff, and they offer incentives to support staff in completing their education with a high school diploma or higher degree.



INVESTING IN CONTINUED STIGMA REDUCTION

Overall, the pilot survey findings moved the coalition to identify opportunities to provide more robust education and training to first responders about substance use disorder and overdose to better equip them to care for people experiencing overdose.

Less than a year after the pilot ended, the coalition and its partners received a \$100,000 Health Resources & Services Administration Rural Health Network Development Planning grant to assess SUD-related stigma in 17 counties. The project will build upon the data collected through this pilot and gather additional data from health professions students, medical providers, first responders and public officials. With this expanded data set, the coalition members will be better prepared to address stigma and improve the lives of those they serve.



INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

“... helping individuals to be successful in our society mitigates many of the social determinants that negatively impact people with addiction illnesses.... it furthers our mission to serve the marginalized and disenfranchised who are simply seeking an opportunity to better their lives”

–Mr. Donald Lloyd, UK St. Claire President/Chief Executive Officer

Brittany Herrington is a Recovery and Outreach Coordinator. As a person recovering from SUD, she works daily to advocate for and support people like her in 10 Kentucky counties.