



Cumberland County Public Health Department's Approach for Allocation of the Opioid Settlement Funds

Overview

Substance Use Disorder is an ongoing, urgent public health issue in the United States, Maine and in Cumberland County. In 2022, drug overdoses in Maine totaled 10,110 with 716 resulting in death, the highest ever recorded and the 9th highest overdose death rate in the U.S.^{1 2} Of those deaths, 134 were people in Cumberland County, the highest number of overdose deaths on record in the county and the highest of any county in Maine over a one-year period. Children, families, and communities have also been impacted. In 2019, there were 16,288 children involved in an investigation of maltreatment by the State of Maine with 1,232 entering the foster care system.³ Substance Use continues to be a key risk factor in over 50% of all child removals in Maine.⁴ Since 2009 there has been a significant reduction in prescription drug misuse among high school students in Cumberland County, yet in 2019, 5% still reported misusing prescription drugs in the past month. At the same time, there has been a significant increase in the number of high school students reporting symptoms of depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide.⁵

Opioid Settlement Funds

Maine's opioid settlement funds are divided into three allocations. Fifty percent is allocated to the Maine Opioid Recovery Council, 30% is allocated to the subdivisions, which include counties and some towns, and 20% is allocated to the Attorney General's office. Cumberland County Government has begun receiving direct payments from several Opioid Settlements and will continue to receive payments for the next 18 years. As of June 2023, there are two finalized settlement payment structures and several others established but not yet finalized. Currently, the County has a balance of \$317,000 from the Opioid Settlement payments. Each year, the total payment amount will fluctuate but the County expects to receive an average of \$211,260 annually. All subdivision recipients of the opioid settlement funds in Maine must spend the money on approved uses for opioid abatement identified in the [Opioid Settlement MOU](#).

Guiding principles for Use of Opioid Settlement Funds

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health created [Guiding Principles for the Use of Funds From the Opioid Litigation](#) that the state of Maine and many other states are using to support their work to spend the money. Those principles include:

1. Spend money to save lives
2. Use evidence to guide spending
3. Invest in youth prevention
4. Focus on racial equity
5. Develop a fair and transparent process for deciding where to spend the funding

¹ <https://mainedrugdata.org/july-2023-monthly-overdose-report/>

² https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/drug_poisoning_mortality/drug_poisoning.htm

³ <https://www.casey.org/media/maine-fact-sheet-2021.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/Child%20Welfare%202022%20Annual%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/2019-results>

Proposed Process for Spending Cumberland County's Opioid Settlement Funds

To live up to the principles outlined above, the Public Health Department proposes to use the following process for spending the opioid settlement funds:

Conduct an assessment: Every 3-5 years, the Cumberland County Public Health Department will conduct an assessment that includes collecting up-to-date data on the problem, identifying current efforts and understanding challenges and gaps in efforts. The assessment will include a survey, focus groups, and/or key informant interviews of people across the County who are working to address the problem and who are directly impacted.

Create an Action Plan: From the assessment, the Public Health Department, led by the Public Health Director with support from the Behavioral Public Health Manager and the Substance Use Prevention Team Lead, will create an action plan for addressing the identified gaps. Some of the strategies will be implemented by the Public Health Department or other departments within the County as appropriate. When outside organizations or direct community engagement is required to address a gap, the Public Health Department will ensure there is a fair process for determining the use and recipient of the funds.

Budgeting: Once an Action Plan is created, the Public Health Department will create a budget to be shared with Commissioners. In the first few years, a 1-year budget will be provided to the Commissioners. In subsequent years as the process becomes clearer and more routine, a 2- or 3-year budget could be provided.

RFP process: As necessary, the Public Health Department will administer a Request for Proposal (RFP) and contracting process. RFP reviewers will include PHD staff, staff from at least one organization working to address the opioid epidemic, at least one person with lived experience, and a staff person from a town that has opted to pool their opioid settlement funds with the County (if applicable).

Work in communities most impacted: The Public Health Department will prioritize strategies that are anticipated to have the largest effect on groups of people and communities that have been most impacted by the opioid problem. This includes people who currently use drugs, people involved in the criminal justice system because of substance use, communities with high overdose rates, children and families of people who use drugs or who have died from opioids, and people who have greater barriers to substance use treatment, recovery, and prevention resources (such as people who are black, indigenous, and people of color, unhoused, LGBTQ+, and/or live in poverty in rural areas).

Reporting: Each year, the Public Health Department will collect data on the efforts funded by opioid settlement funds. A report will be submitted to the state as required by the Opioid Settlement MOU and will be shared with the County Commissioners and the public.

Approved by the County Commissioners on September 11, 2023