

SNOHOMISH OVERDOSE PREVENTION

**A COMMUNITY COMING TOGETHER TO STOP
SNOHOMISH COUNTY'S OPIOID EPIDEMIC**

IMPACTS OF THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY

Millions of Americans struggle with substance use disorder and communities throughout the U.S. continue to experience an epidemic of opioid use.

It has long been clear that no single agency or group can effectively address this epidemic on its own.

In Snohomish County, we are reforging connections and regaining momentum on a joint emergency response.

We know that:

- More than 860 people in Snohomish County have died of overdoses since the start of 2020, and 658 of those were opioid-related. The total had already passed 80 fatal overdoses within the first quarter of 2023, more than half of them tied to opioids.
- Most of these overdoses were accidental, and most often the drugs involved included opioids. However, it is common for more than one drug to be involved. Methamphetamine is right behind opioids in the death toll.
- The deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl has become an increasingly frequent killer in Snohomish County. It is accessible, cheap, and being cut into other drugs such as heroin and meth. Fentanyl was involved in more than 80% of opioid-related deaths in 2022, compared to 23% in 2017.
- The way people use has changed over time. It is more common now to smoke or swallow opioids and less common to inject.

In 2017, Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers launched a coordinated effort to focus on reducing overdose deaths and the wide-ranging impacts of opioid use disorder on local communities. This Snohomish County Opioid Response Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC Group) aims to tackle the opioid emergency with many of the same tools deployed for other disasters – floods, fires, earthquakes, even pandemics.

We are fortunate to live in a county where this type of partnership exists. We also are at a point in the opioid response where we need to reinvigorate and strengthen our coordinated approach.

Starting in early 2020, many vital resources and staff were deployed on life-saving efforts for the COVID-19 pandemic. Though opioid and overdose prevention work continued among MAC Group members, coordination was greatly reduced. Now, more than five years after the formation of the MAC Group, the landscape of opioid abuse and overdoses in our county has changed. The MAC Group is working to build up existing programs and projects, as well as meet new challenges. Executive Somers in May 2023 announced an Executive Directive reemphasizing his commitment to an urgent, robust, and collaborative response to the drug crisis and establishing a new Disaster Policy Group. [The announcement](#) also included an initial \$1.4 million spending plan for the County's opioid settlement funds that supports community-centered response efforts and creates a blueprint for spending the County's full \$14 million allocation (spread over 17 years).

CURRENT EFFORTS BY MAC GROUP PARTNERS

- Regular Narcan/naloxone trainings throughout the community, twice-monthly on average.
 - Online request forms available for [individuals](#) and [organizations](#) to increase access to trainings.
- Working with schools on youth substance use prevention and intervention.
 - Snohomish County Human Services contracts with 11 school districts including 52 schools to provide Student Support Advocates, and to provide curricula and support to interested districts.

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- Snohomish County Health Department provides online and in-person [training opportunities](#) for school staff on how to use naloxone and works with interested schools to have naloxone available on site.
- The Office of Neighborhoods at the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office disbanded in June 2022 because of staffing constraints. It had a major impact. In 2021, the team made initial contacts with 1,027 new clients, scheduled 333 individuals for inpatient treatment, had 186 individuals complete inpatient treatment, helped 102 initiate intensive outpatient treatment, and secured housing for 177. The team also scheduled 475 individuals for assessments for substance use disorders. Snohomish County Human Services in 2023 developed a new program to redeploy social workers with deputies. In February, Executive Dave Somers and Sheriff Adam Fortney launched the new effort as a partnership to continue helping some of the community's most vulnerable people.
- The Snohomish County Jail, in partnership with Snohomish County Human Services, participates in the HCA Naloxone Distribution Project and distributes Narcan kits to people who are incarcerated as they are released. When an incarcerated person arrives to booking, they receive a urine screening and people who are currently using opiates, have a history of opiate use and/or are at risk of an overdose are offered a free Narcan kit to be placed in their property box for retrieval upon release from jail. For those who accept the kit, a registered nurse provides them with educational resources to explain what Narcan is, as well as when and how to use it.
- Managing a Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) program in the Snohomish County Jail to treat people who are incarcerated who suffer from opioid withdrawal at the time they are booked. This work has been underway for much of the last five years. Following their withdrawal taper, people can participate with an in-jail opioid treatment plan. This involves maintenance dosing if they meet criteria after an assessment by an opioid treatment provider. If approved, they are required to follow-up with a community MOUD provider upon release.
- Working to increase capacity in rural areas for treatment and recovery, specifically in areas around Darrington and parts of Sky Valley, in coordination with 15 cross-sector partners. This work is funded through a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant.

Scope of the problem

At 284 total fatal overdoses – opioids as well as other drugs* – we lost more than five people per week on average in 2022.

- Between 2017 and 2022, the number of opioid-related overdose deaths reported in Snohomish County more than doubled. The number of those that involved fentanyl jumped from 24 to 189, a nearly eight-fold increase.
- From 2017-2022, most opioid overdoses (54%) reported by local emergency departments occurred in a private residence, and about 30% had occurred in a public place such as a park, public building, or business. Fewer than 5% occurred at a hotel, camp, or shelter.
- In 2022, 11,700 patients at Providence Regional Medical Center Everett were experiencing substance use disorder. That's a larger number than the population of the City of Snohomish.
- Like the population of Snohomish County overall, the largest demographic who experience a fatal or non-fatal opioid overdose are non-Hispanic white. However, data show that Native American and Black communities are disproportionately impacted by overdoses.
- A positive change in recent years is the increased availability and use of naloxone, a nasal spray that reverses opioid overdose. In 2022, local emergency departments reported 77 percent of overdose patients had received naloxone treatment prior to arriving at the hospital, up from 64 percent in 2020.

*non-opioid drug categories included in the Snohomish County Medical Examiner [data dashboard](#) include meth, benzo, cocaine, MDMA, synthetic cannabinoid, and alcohol.

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- Implementing or expanding evidence-based strategies such as a naloxone leave-behind program with first responders, the addition of a full-time school counselor for one of our rural districts, support for local drug take-back events, and a new community education campaign built around helping people find treatment and support, as well as reducing stigma.
- Maintaining web and social media presence for the MAC Group's outreach via the Snohomish Overdose Prevention branded [website and social media channels](#).
 - Social media and ad campaigns to educate youth and young adults as well as parents and guardians about the risk of opioid use, particularly fentanyl.
- Data partnerships with our two major hospitals – Providence Regional Medical Center Everett and Swedish Edmonds – to help gather data on non-fatal overdoses as well as to support patient follow-up.
- Following the passage of House Bill 1074 in the last legislative session, public health staff are laying the groundwork for an overdose fatality review committee.
- Increasing avenues for support and treatment to help high-risk populations such as pregnant women, new mothers, and babies born to women with opioid use disorder.
 - A partnership with Homeward House assists with connections to social services.
 - Snohomish and Skagit County's public health agencies co-sponsored the conference "Pregnancy and Beyond" in August 2022 focused on best practices for improving the care and outcomes for these populations. More than 110 health care providers working in pre- and post-natal care and/or treatment attended.
- Providing and tracking supplies of naloxone for 10 law enforcement agencies in Snohomish County. Outreach continues to expand this program.
- Providing free needle clean-up kits at Snohomish County Health Department and other locations around the county to residents and business owners. These kits include supplies for the safe disposal of used syringes found in the community.

There are a number of important efforts underway. This crisis has many layers, and there is still much work to be done.

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