
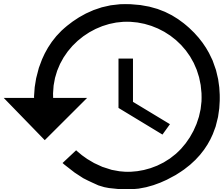




Strategies to Optimize Opioid Abatement Funds

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Problem Statement	Background	State and Metrowest Data	Recommendations
			

Problem Statement



The influx of Opioid Abatement Settlement Funds to communities provides a great opportunity to address this health challenge in a meaningful and impactful way.

The opioid crisis has deeply affected communities across Massachusetts, necessitating comprehensive strategies to address its multifaceted challenges. In response to legal actions against entities involved in fueling the crisis, settlements have provided significant funds to municipalities. These funds range per municipality. This document serves as guidance in the strategic allocation of opioid abatement funds to effectively combat opioid addiction and its consequences.

Background



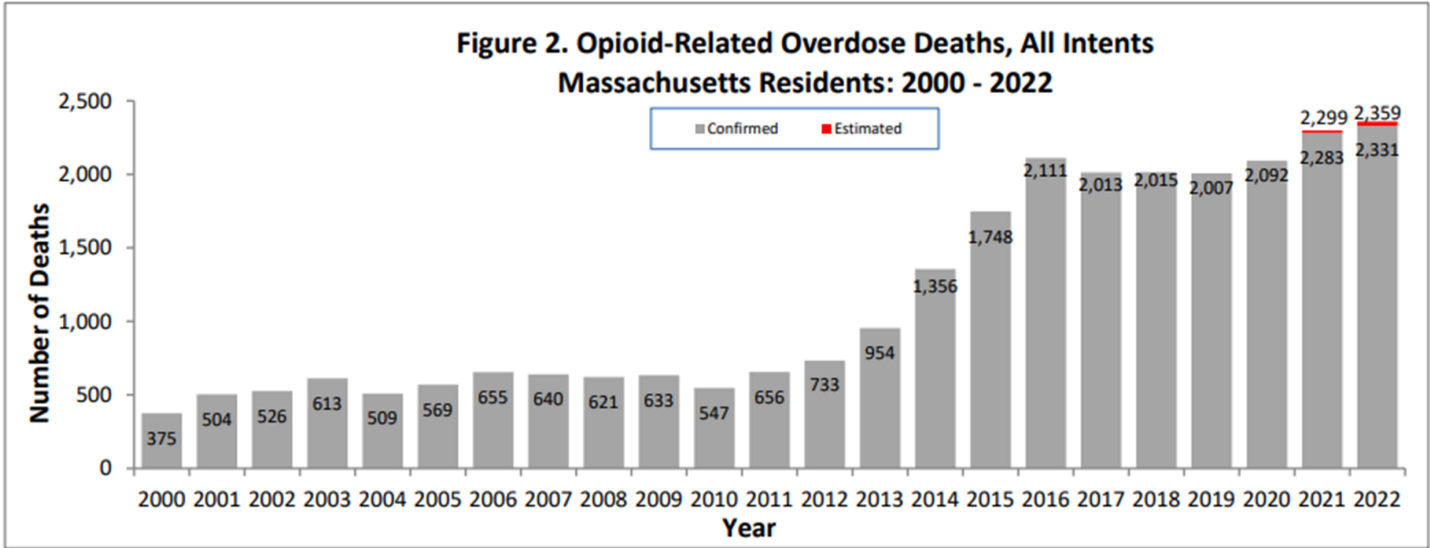
Prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction efforts are key.

Opioid settlement abatement funds are compensation from legal actions against opioid industry players. In MA, investigations found deceptive practices by manufacturers, lax monitoring by distributors, and inadequate scrutiny by pharmacies. 40% of these funds are directed to local municipalities to manage substance use issues. This money supports prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction efforts. Community collaboration is vital for effective fund utilization. Together, the region can combat the opioid crisis and foster healthier communities.

Our Year in Numbers

State Overdose Data

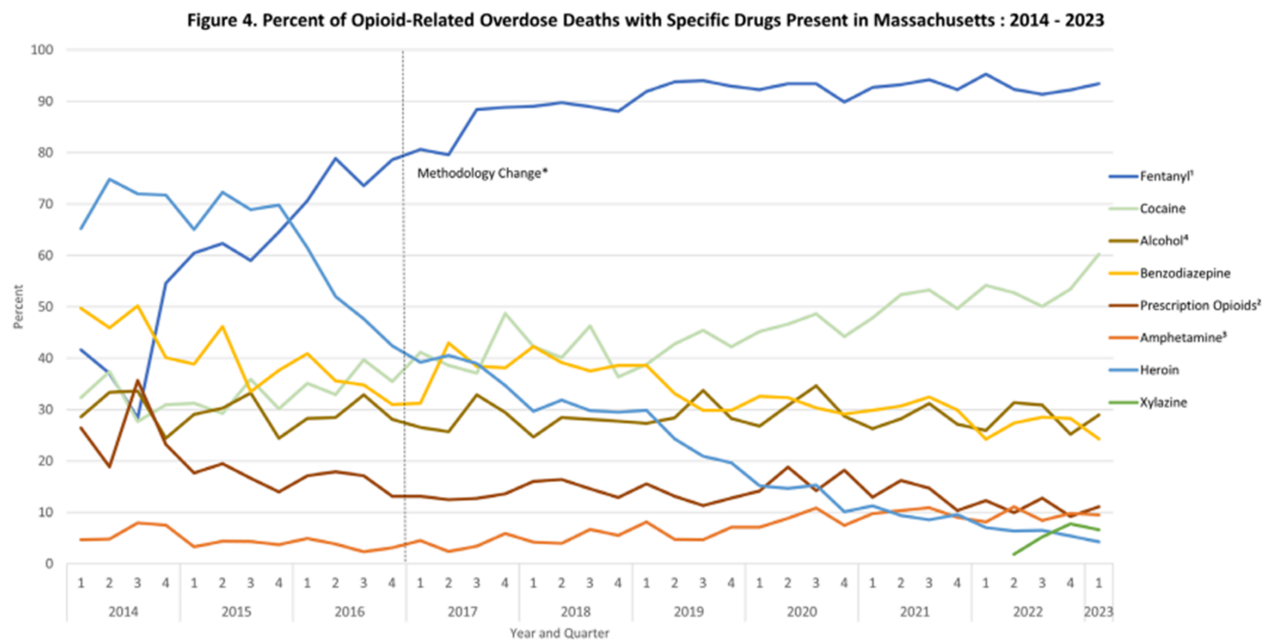
Figure 2 illustrates the Massachusetts yearly trend in confirmed and estimated opioid-related overdose deaths from 2000 to 2022.



Source: DPH Data Brief: Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths among Massachusetts Residents, Dec 2023

State Overdose Data with Specific Substances

Fentanyl emerges as the dominant substance in state opioid-related overdose deaths, consistently surpassing all other substances in prevalence. In both 2022 and the first quarter of 2023, fentanyl was detected in 93% of cases highlighting its prevalence in opioid-related fatalities, driving opioid overdoses and highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to address its impact on public health.



Source: DPH Data Brief: Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths among Massachusetts Residents, Dec 2023

Middlesex County Data

Critical Incident Management Systems (CIMS)

Locally, Middlesex County data reflects optimism on overdose responses in CIMS data between 2022 and 2023. CIMS data reflects EMS data inputted by local police departments in the county. This highlights the success of prevention and harm reduction work. New concerns are arising with increased values in at-risk incidents and behavioral health incidents, which could result in overdoses.

Incident Type	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change 2022 v 2023
Non-Fatal	800 (66%)	1,029 (59%)	838 (49%)	727 (37%)	-13%
Fatal	114 (9%)	161 (9%)	109 (6%)	104 (5%)	-5%
At-Risk	98 (8%)	121 (7%)	187 (11%)	227 (11%)	+21%
Behavioral Health	204 (17%)	424 (24%)	579 (34%)	922 (47%)	+59%
Total	1,216 (100%)	1,735 (100%)	1,713 (100%)	1,980 (100%)	+16%

Source: 2023 Middlesex County Annual Report Combined, Kelley Research Associates.

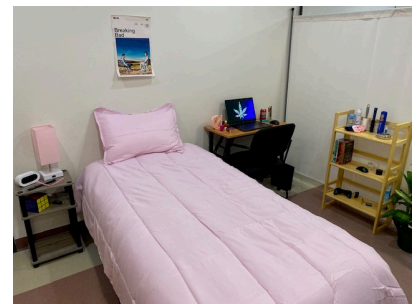
Early Intervention

Early intervention is critical, as substance experimentation often begins during adolescence, a period of heightened vulnerability. By addressing factors like peer influence and social norms, tailored prevention strategies can disrupt the progression towards opioid misuse. Education is essential, empowering youth to make informed decisions about their health and providing alternative coping mechanisms. Drug Story Theatre is a educational organization that ties in community shows with school districts. By teaching students the neuroscience of addiction and performing plays based on peer stories of recovery, Drug Story Theatre offers an engaging early intervention program that ties lived experience with science.



**“The Treatment of One
Becomes the Prevention of
Many”**

Hidden-in-Plain-Sight displays in schools are another effective way to start a health conversation with parents and students on substance use. The interactive display showcases potential items in a teen’s bedroom that might signal risky behavior or substance use. This display is paired with educational posters and printed materials to increase caregiver awareness and provide resources for starting positive conversations with youth. A follow-up conversation forum can be paired with these displays with local Law Enforcement, school resource officers and the health department about what behaviors and trends they are seeing in our communities. Parents are encouraged to share additional thoughts about the mock bedroom and discuss social hosts laws.



**Hidden-in-Plain Sight
Display forum at Lincoln-
Sudbury Regional High
School, January 2024**

Regional Collaboration

Tapping into existing public health coalitions, such as shared service arrangements that are supported through the Office of Local and Regional Health is a way to stretch the opioid abatement funds.

Creating an Intermunicipal Agreement

Pooling resources towards substance use prevention programs regionally allows for information sharing and affirmation that substance use does not recognize community boundaries. With support from each municipality’s legal team, an intermunicipal agreement (IMA) can be formally established to

spell out services rendered in each participating community and at a specified, agreed upon price. Identifying neighboring communities with similar substance use data to engage in an IMA can further substance use programming regionally. Massachusetts Association of Health Boards (MAHB) provides draft IMAs that communities can be amended and adopted.

Regional Substance Use Coordinator Position

A shared service goal can be creating a Regional Substance Use Coordinator position with pooled opioid abatement funds from an IMA. The fiscal agent community should work with the communities in the region with developing a job description that best focuses on addressing regional substance use projects. Key Responsibilities for this position includes program development by supporting evidence-based substance use prevention programs, community collaboration by working with local communities' stakeholders to identify needs and develop specific strategies. Data analysis on regional prevention efforts' effectiveness and reporting are important to the success of this role.

Lived Experience Forums

Peer support groups provide a platform where individuals facing similar challenges can share their experiences, fostering a sense of solidarity and understanding. Through peer support, individuals gain empowerment and confidence in their ability to cope with addiction-related issues, both for themselves and their loved ones. Peer recovery support services led by organizations such as Learn to Cope and MOAR, plays a vital role in promoting resilience, fostering community, and facilitating the journey toward recovery for individuals and families affected by addiction. Peers often offer practical advice and strategies based on their own experiences, which can be invaluable for navigating the complexities of addiction recovery. Dealing with addiction can be emotionally taxing, and peer support provides a source of empathy, validation, and encouragement during difficult times. These forums normalize conversations around addiction.



Looking Ahead



Strengthening partnerships regionally and locally by pooling opioid abatement resources can stretch funds and fuel exchanging ideas.



Destigmatizing substance use prevention is central to all of the work towards this. Normalizing Narcan trainings and other harm reduction methods is important to make impactful change.



Most critically, seek community feedback from those living with experience.

Further Reading

National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2021). Prescription Opioids DrugFacts.

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-opioids>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021). Medication-Assisted Treatment.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Drug Overdose.

<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>

2023 Middlesex County Annual Report Combined, Kelley Research Associates.

DPH Data Brief: Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths among Massachusetts Residents, Dec 2023

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/opioid-related-overdose-deaths-among-ma-residents-december-2023/download>
