



CALPHO/Legislative Study Committee 7/31/19 Mesa County Talking Points

The **Mesa County Opioid Response Group** is convened and facilitated by Charity Weir and Kelsey Fife from Mesa County Public Health. In our role as the Community Health Strategist, we convene this group of key stakeholders and community partners to collaborate and drive action from prevention through treatment, recovery, and beyond. Funding for this work comes from the Regional Health Connector SIM funding and CDPHE Provider Education funding. Harm Reduction strategies include medication safety and naloxone education.

Safe Disposal – there are currently six locations in Mesa County. Two of the locations (St. Mary's and De Beque) are run by Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). The coalition added two new locations through CDPHE, which provide access to medication disposal on eastern and western ends of the Grand Valley. Based on recently released DEA data, four out of the top five pharmacies with the largest number of pills are in areas without a drop box. Working with corporate pharmacies (e.g. City Market, Walmart, Walgreens, Rite Aid) is a challenge because we currently lack professional connections with these businesses and permission for changes is required from management that may not be based locally.

Disposal data through June 2019 for CDPHE locations:

- The De Beque Marshal's Office began collecting in November 2017, but has yet to send in any boxes for destruction.
- St. Mary's Medical Center began collecting in June 2018. They sent their first box in for destruction in July 2018 and through June 2019 have sent in 391 pounds.
- The Palisade Pharmacy began collecting in February 2019. The only box they have sent in for destruction through June 2019 was in May and it weighed 31 pounds.
- Colorado Canyons Hospital began collecting in May 2019 and through June had not yet sent in any boxes for destruction.

Challenges: these locations are medication disposal only. Mesa County does have a syringe exchange program through the Western Colorado Health Network (see below), but no other needle disposal locations besides place-based disposal boxes included in organization bathrooms (e.g. airport, hospitals). The decision to install these boxes is organization-based, and there is no accurate count of the number available locally.

Harm Reduction - Western Colorado Health Network (WCHN) Syringe Access Programs (SAPs) are primarily funded through a CDPHE grant, Colorado HIV and AIDS Prevention Grant Program (CHAPP). WCHN also receives United Way funding specific to youth prevention efforts and are a beneficiary of the Telluride Aids Benefit annual fundraiser. In 2018, 160,000 syringes were distributed with a return rate of 70%.

WCHN serves 22 counties: Archuleta, Delta, Dolores, Eagle, Garfield, Grand, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Jackson, Lake, La Plata, Mesa, Moffat, Montezuma, Montrose, Ouray, Pitkin, Routt, Rio Blanco, San Juan, San Miguel, and Summit

Barriers to expanding: legal barriers, such as paraphernalia laws, need to be addressed but ideology and politics often stand in the way of passing new legislation. The existence of such practices remains a moral



issue in many communities. Lack of funding and limited capacity will be a barrier if other counties allow syringe access programs.

Naloxone – provided by WCHN and MindSprings Peer Recovery Coach (Office of Behavioral Health Funding). In 2018, 766 doses of naloxone dispensed. Challenges: WCHN runs out of Naloxone regularly and can sometimes get it from Peer Recovery Coach. Tracking Naloxone usage is challenging because clients are concerned about reporting it on OpiRescue. Additionally, they don't always have access to a phone or phone with app capabilities. There's a continued need to educate people about calling 911 after administering.

Challenges: Lack of community support and stigma towards the idea of harm reduction and towards staff. Western Colorado Health Network is growing and needs are always increasing. Clients are collecting syringes from multiple community partners (e.g. last week two clients came in and exchanged 2500 needles).