

Columbus County Impact Report Narratives for Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Each local government that receives opioid settlement funds is asked to share an Annual Settlement Update describing how they have made use of settlement funds during each fiscal year. For each strategy funded, local governments also share additional narratives to describe their progress and successes (success information is optional for some local governments). Across all funded strategies, each local government selects one progress narrative and one success narrative to spotlight each fiscal year.

Columbus County provided the following narrative information for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (July 2023 through June 2024):

Annual Settlement Update

Columbus County has an Opioid Steering Committee, appointed by the County Commissioners, who met every month during FY24 to monitor progress on its strategies and activities associated with the opioid settlement funds and the strategic plan. The Committee adopted a model, entitled a Recovery Oriented System of Care (ROSC), and has used the opioid settlement funds to develop strategies and programs in 5 areas: Harm Reduction, Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Recovery Supports. In addition, the Committee and County Commissioners targeted County infrastructure (i.e. staff and software) to support, monitor, and report the activities and functions as a result of the opioid funding. The County also has used opioid settlement funds to support the County's application for a HRSA (Federal Human Resource Service Administration) grant to expand the reach of interventions into the County Human Services (i.e. DSS, Child Welfare, and the Columbus County Health Department) to conduct assessments, intervention, and connections to treatment for those adults who have an opioid use issue and their children who may have been exposed to opioid use during the pre/postnatal period.

Strategy Spotlights

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy B2: Support People in Treatment and Recovery: Provide the full continuum of care for OUD and any co-occurring SUD/MH conditions

Progress Narrative

Columbus County continues to have limited access to detoxification services and short- or long-term recovery supports for its residents. Through its contractual agreement with The Healing Place of New Hanover County (HPNHC), the county has made significant progress in addressing this challenge. The County contracts for 10-12 beds per day/annually with HPNHC.

Under this agreement, Columbus County residents have immediate, 24/7 access to vital services, including homeless shelter accommodations, social setting detoxification beds, MAT, and short- and long-term recovery support. These resources are available to any adult resident of Columbus County who requires this level of assistance and support.

The Healing Place of New Hanover County employs an evidence-based practice model. The addition of MAT to its continuum of care (naltrexone injections) signifies a significant enhancement in residential support. This development allows individuals with an OUD to access residential support

services while concurrently receiving MAT, marking a substantial step forward in combating the opioid crisis within Columbus County.

During SFY24, 86 Columbus County residents were admitted to HPNHC for detox and treatment for a total of 1631 days of treatment services provided. Of these persons admitted, 57 were men and 29 were women. 51% were using opioids, 20% were using crack/cocaine, 17% were using alcohol, 10% were using methamphetamine, and 3% were using opioids/benzodiazepines.

Obtaining satisfaction information has been difficult for the outcome measure. The County is working with HPNHC to develop a way to determine outcomes for this measure.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy F2: Ensure Appropriate Prescribing and Dispensing of Opioids: Training for health care providers regarding safe and responsible opioid prescribing, dosing, and tapering

Success Narrative

Training was provided to 59 participants and 100% of them reported that they learned new information in the trainings. A quote from a participant: “To have this training on non-opioid medication options for chronic pain management has been invaluable, particularly considering that the role of the psychiatrist is such an esteemed one. It has changed my management and context to address chronic pain.”

Progress and Success Narratives for All Funded Strategies

❖ Exhibit A, Strategy 1: Collaborative Strategic Planning

Progress Narrative

A contract will be negotiated to provide technical support and grant writing to leverage the opioid settlement funds. Opioid settlement funds will be used to apply for federal and state funds to expand services for individuals with opioid use disorders, substance use disorders, and mental health disorders in Columbus County.

Success Narrative

One federal grant was applied for during SFY24 from the Human Resource Services Administration (HRSA) to impact individuals in the Columbus County Social Services/Child Welfare and Health Departments. Services will include the implementation of 2 evidence-based practice models in those organizations to identify, assess, intervene, and treat individuals with opioid use disorders in those systems.

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Success Narrative

A total of 86 Columbus County residents received treatment at The Healing Place of New Hanover County for a total of 1631 treatment days funded during this reporting period.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy B7: Support People in Treatment and Recovery: Provide/support transportation to treatment or recovery programs for persons with OUD and any co-occurring SUD/MH conditions

Progress Narrative

Columbus County contracted with Healing Hearts Transportation to transport individuals meeting criteria to the Dix Facility-Based Crisis Center in Jacksonville, North Carolina, Walter B. Jones Hospital in Greenville, North Carolina, or other substance use disorder support services, if The Healing Place of New Hanover County is not available or an appropriate placement.

Success Narrative

Two Columbus County residents were transported to substance use services using these funds, when no other transportation was available.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy C16: Connect People to the Help They Need: Support centralized call centers that provide information and connections for persons with OUD

Progress Narrative

Columbus County recognized the critical need for immediate access to opioid use disorder (OUD), substance use disorder (SUD), and mental health (MH) services within the community. The challenge has not been the absence of services but rather the lack of awareness among residents regarding how to access these vital resources.

To better facilitate access to OUD, SUD, and OUD/SUD/MH treatment services, the County introduced the role of an Opioid/SUD Services Coordinator through a contractual position that started May 3, 2023.

One of the standout initiatives is the establishment of a 24/7 crisis phone line, manned by a Licensed Mental Health Professional (MHP). This phone line is open to anyone in Columbus County facing a crisis and seeking assistance in accessing OUD/SUD or OUD/SUD/MH treatment services. The crisis phone line has been promoted across various community touchpoints, including County services, Columbus County Hospital, law enforcement agencies, and local community groups, including churches.

In addition to crisis response, the OUD Resource Coordinator is actively engaged in compiling and updating a comprehensive resource directory. They are also delivering in-service training sessions to community groups on topics such as the use of naloxone, tackling stigma associated with OUD/SUD, SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment), and other relevant subjects.

The OUD Resource Coordinator maintains 24/7 access to The Healing Place of New Hanover County, enabling immediate referrals to this valuable resource. They are equipped to arrange transportation from any location within Columbus County when needed.

Success Narrative

The call center took 97 calls during SFY24 and referred or provided resources to these callers.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy D7: Address the Needs of Criminal-Justice-Involved Persons: Provide training on best practices for addressing the needs of criminal-justice-involved persons

Progress Narrative

Columbus County does not have an adult drug court at this time. However, Judge Scott Ussery has stepped forward to lead the effort in the establishment of an adult drug court for the county.

During this funding year, two judges attended the National Drug Court Conference. This conference served as a valuable platform for them to become familiar with evidence-based practice (EBP) models for drug courts and gain insights from the experiences of other judges.

A BJA grant that was applied for in SFY23 did not get awarded, but other funding sources are being explored.

Success Narrative

One judge spoke very highly of the Drug Court conference. Both judge attendees want to participate in an Adult Drug Court in Columbus County.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy E5: Address the Needs of Pregnant Women and Their Families: Provide training to health care providers on best practices for compliance with federal requirements for children born with NAS

Progress Narrative

Training was facilitated by Dr. Ira Chasnoff, a renowned authority in working with pregnant women, especially those grappling with opioid addiction, and their children.

The training program was designed to be comprehensive, involving various key stakeholders in the community. Training included recognizing the signs and symptoms of substance use disorders, intervention, and treatment techniques for women, family members, and children. Participants included child protective services case workers, social service case workers, prenatal nursing staff from the health department, as well as OB/GYN and Pediatric staff within the Columbus Regional Healthcare System.

The primary aim of this training initiative is to establish a uniform and cohesive approach across all relevant systems when dealing with pregnant and pre/postnatal women with opioid use disorder (OUD) or substance use disorder (SUD). The focus extends to addressing the unique challenges associated with infants born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome.

By providing training and fostering collaboration among these diverse groups, Columbus County took a significant step forward in ensuring the well-being of vulnerable women and their children. Dr. Chasnoff's expertise will undoubtedly contribute to a more informed and compassionate approach to care for this particular population, aligning the efforts of various professionals towards a common goal of improved health outcomes and support. The initiative represents a commitment to strengthening the community's response to the complex needs of pregnant women and their children affected by substance use.

Success Narrative

A quote from a Columbus County physician: "Great day, learned a lot. Dr. Chasnoff took a complicated subject and was able to make it meaningful without talking down to the people in the training." This training will continue to be a strategy in SFY25.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy F2: Ensure Appropriate Prescribing and Dispensing of Opioids: Training for health care providers regarding safe and responsible opioid prescribing, dosing, and tapering

Progress Narrative

Training was provided on overprescribing of opioids and alternatives to using pain medications. There are a total of nine training sessions in this series to be provided to Columbus County Medical Society Physicians. Five of the training sessions were held in SFY 2023-2024 and the remaining four sessions will be held in SFY 2024-2025. Trainings were conducted by Paul Buongiorno, MD.

Success Narrative

Training was provided to 59 participants and 100% of them reported that they learned new information in the trainings. A quote from a participant: "To have this training on non-opioid medication options for chronic pain management has been invaluable, particularly considering that the role of the psychiatrist is such an esteemed one. It has changed my management and context to address chronic pain."

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy G1: Prevent Misuse of Opioids: Fund media campaigns to prevent opioid misuse

Progress Narrative

As SFY24 unfolded, it became evident to the Opioid Steering Committee that a comprehensive and impactful marketing approach and media campaign was required.

The Committee recognized that developing a robust marketing strategy would yield more substantial results. This strategy encompassed the creation of a distinctive logo and a diverse range of public messaging tools suitable for deployment on billboards, yard signs, and social media platforms. By taking this approach, Columbus County aims to deliver information and messaging that resonates effectively with its residents.

The development of this comprehensive marketing strategy occurred during this reporting period. This marketing strategy reflects a commitment to engaging the community in a more compelling and resonant manner. It also underscores the county's dedication to tackling opioid-related challenges

through effective communication and education, ensuring that residents are well-informed and empowered to make positive choices regarding their health and well-being.

A marketing and community education campaign using billboards and yard signs has been developed. It will include a mailing campaign so that every mailbox address gets literature addressing opioid crisis and intervention services. It will also include developing social media and/or website for the campaign. This strategy continues into FY 2024-2025 and the campaign will kick off in September 2024.

Success Narrative

A marketing and community education campaign using billboards and yard signs has been developed. It will include a mailing campaign so that every mailbox address gets literature addressing opioid crisis and intervention services. It will also include developing social media and/or website for the campaign. This strategy continues into FY 2024-2025 and the campaign will kick off in September 2024.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy G8: Prevent Misuse of Opioids: Fund evidence-based prevention programs in schools or community education programs

Progress Narrative

During SFY24, Columbus County and Whiteville City school systems jointly implemented the Botkin LifeSkills Training model at the beginning of the school year with their 6th grade students.

This ambitious project was introduced to all sixth-grade students in fall of 2023. Between the two school systems, 14 teachers and 575 students were trained on Level 1 of the program. As students progress through subsequent grade levels this year, they will continue to benefit from advanced curricula, ensuring program continuity at least until the ninth grade. For SFY25, 6th and 7th graders will take the program. Level 1 will be provided to 6th graders and Level 2 will be provided to 7th graders. Additionally, the program incorporates an evaluation component that will assess its effectiveness and make necessary improvements.

Success Narrative

14 teachers and 575 sixth graders in the two school systems were trained in this program.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy H5: Prevent Overdose Deaths and Other Harm: Expand, improve, or develop data tracking software and applications for overdoses/naloxone revivals

Progress Narrative

Historically, Columbus County has faced a notable challenge in its efforts to track critical information regarding first responders and law enforcement calls related to overdoses, naloxone usage, and naloxone reversals. The County has not had a comprehensive data system for this purpose.

A significant complicating factor is the existence of five separate EMS departments, all functioning as sub-contractors, each utilizing distinct software platforms to record their data. Over the course of FY 2023, Columbus County diligently conducted research into various data tracking software options. During the current reporting period (FY 2024), funds for this strategy were used to purchase FirstWatch, a database that all EMS departments will use to track calls and data. Data collection implementation has been successful, and dashboards can be used to collect and analyze data.

The collection of this data is pivotal for several reasons, including accurately predicting the quantity of naloxone required for the county, as well as analyzing the locations of opioid-related overdose incidents and the demographic characteristics of those affected, all in real time.

Success Narrative

The implementation of the software has allowed the collection of data about each of the calls that EMS runs. Using this EMS software will allow the county to accurately predict the amount of naloxone that is needed to supply all first responders with an adequate supply. In SFY23, there were 8 deaths among EMS overdose calls. In SFY24, only 3 deaths were among EMS overdose calls. In SFY24, there was an 11% drop in EMS overdose calls and a 10% decrease in naloxone administration by EMS. There was a 39% drop in the number of visits to Columbus Regional ED in SFY24%. The database also indicates that 61% of overdose calls were due to fentanyl.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy J1: Leadership, Planning, and Coordination: Statewide, regional, local, or community regional planning to address the opioid epidemic

Progress Narrative

During the Columbus County Needs Assessment and Strategic Planning Process, a concern emerged surrounding the alarming frequency of opioid overdoses and reversals, coupled with individuals with opioid use disorder (OUD), substance use disorder (SUD), and mental health (MH) conditions being admitted to the Columbus Regional Healthcare Emergency Department under involuntary commitment (IVC) status. This issue prompted a call to action within the strategic plan, with a focus on conducting an in-depth study to ascertain the root causes and recommend strategies to address it. The ultimate goal was to alleviate the strain on the emergency department and reduce reliance on the IVC statute by the magistrate court in handling OUD, SUD, and MH issues prevalent in the county.

Recognizing the gravity of this challenge, Columbus County extended invitations to both the Columbus County Regional Healthcare System and the Columbus County Hospital Foundation to join forces in sharing the expenses associated with the study. In fiscal year 2023, financial alignment for this study was secured, paving the way for its commencement in fiscal year 2024.

This comprehensive study was completion during SFY24. It represents a concerted effort by these key stakeholders to understand the complexities surrounding the issue, identify underlying causes, and propose effective solutions. By proactively addressing the root causes of these admissions and IVC status cases, Columbus County is striving to enhance the well-being of its residents while streamlining the healthcare and judicial systems to better serve the community.

Success Narrative

As a result of the data collected in the study, the Columbus County Regional Healthcare System is considering turning their 4th floor into an adult crisis MH/SUD/OUD floor. They have hired a consulting firm to help them determine how best to use that floor to better meet the needs of the citizens.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy J4: Leadership, Planning, and Coordination: Provide resources to staff government oversight and management of opioid abatement programs

Progress Narrative

Columbus County ensured responsible management of its opioid settlement funds by appointing an Opioid Settlement Grants Manager prior to this reporting period. This dedicated professional filled

crucial responsibilities of collecting, tracking, and reporting on all expenditures associated with the county's opioid settlement funds.

The Grants Manager assumed their role on June 21, 2023, and operates under the direct supervision of the Finance Director of Columbus County. To ensure comprehensive understanding and compliance with the stringent accountability requirements related to the opioid settlement funds, the Grants Manager has actively participated in various online training programs. These training sessions have equipped them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively oversee and coordinate the county's initiatives tied to these funds.

With the Grants Manager's expertise and commitment, Columbus County has managed its opioid settlement funds efficiently and transparently, furthering the county's efforts to address the opioid crisis.

There has been turnover in this position after the end of SFY24 and a decision will be made quickly about hiring a new person or shifting management responsibilities to ensure that there is no lapse in the organized reporting and management of funds.

Success Narrative

The position was filled for the full reporting period and all reports were submitted in a timely manner.