



WHATCOM COUNTY
**HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**



2026 Spend Plan for Opioid Settlement Funds

Background

Opioid misuse has been a concern in Whatcom County for many years and strains many public and social services. While misuse of prescription opioids has trended downward for the past several years, other synthetic opioids (e.g. Fentanyl) have experienced significant growth. With high potency opioids more available and poly drug use on the rise, overdose incidences and overdose deaths have been a concern. Whatcom County fatal overdoses increased nearly 50% from 2022 to 2023, and non-fatal overdoses have increased significantly, as well. Without proper interventions and expanded supports, these concerns increase the need for more expensive and intensive supports (treatment, emergency room visits, jail, etc.).

Overview

Opioid settlement funding will be received by eligible government entities over a multi-year period. In preparation, extensive engagement of key stakeholders and the broader community took place in Whatcom County to assess local needs and gaps and to identify priorities for potential services and strategies. Planning relied on a comprehensive review of needs and services across the Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Aftercare (PITA) continuum of care.

The Whatcom County Opioid Task Force was convened in 2016 and supported ongoing opioid mitigation work, and in the past couple of years local efforts have grown to include a Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group and large scale community planning events, such as All Hands Whatcom. All of these efforts continue to provide opportunities for public engagement in opioid response efforts.

Planning

Frameworks

Whatcom County has provided substance use disorder initiatives for decades. Some of these efforts have included a direct focus on opioids and others have targeted the reduction of key risk factors related to the use of all substances. Throughout this work, Whatcom County has relied on frameworks based in science to ensure services are well planned, meet local needs, and demonstrate effectiveness in their delivery. The overarching planning framework has been the [Strategic Planning Framework](#),

adopted from the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Service Administration's (SAMHSA), which is a continual process and ensures ongoing community needs are supported through an collaborative, data-driven, and comprehensive approach.



Planning and assessment has aligned with other critical research, such as Risk & Protective Factors and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's). Planning around strategy selection also relied on the Substance Use Continuum of Care, originally developed by the Institute of Medicine and adapted by the substance use field, which includes a focus on Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Aftercare (PITA). A focus across this "PITA Continuum" is used to ensure a comprehensive approach to supports is considered.

Community Process

Opioid settlement funding requires that communities ensure **"there is opportunity for community-based input on priorities for Opioid Fund programs and services."** Whatcom County has excelled at engaging community stakeholders in strategic planning. Feedback has been, and continues to be, collected from groups and stakeholders that help identify needs, gaps, and potential strategies that are necessary to continue to address opioid and other substance misuse. Involvement of the community in opioid response planning and prioritizing has been a cornerstone of local efforts. This has come in the form of participation in the Opioid Task Force, Opioid MAC (Multi-Agency Coordination) Groups, All Hands Whatcom community events, Fentanyl Operations Plan development, local coalition meetings, and various county board and community meetings.

A number of local, regional, and state plans were also reviewed and considered to ensure efforts were not duplicated and that strategies could align as much as possible. Alignment with these plans ensured efforts were coordinated, built upon existing services, and provided maximum opportunity to leverage additional resources.

State Plan

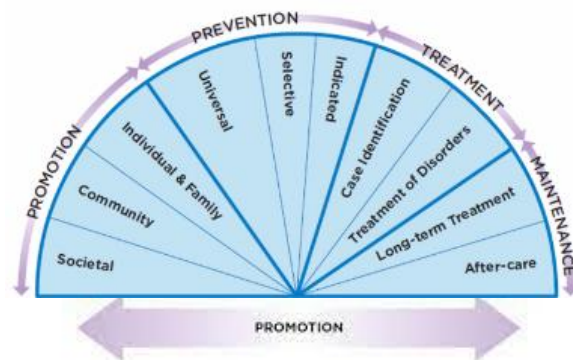
The Washington State Health Care Authority leads statewide substance use prevention and response efforts and utilizes the frameworks described earlier. Whatcom County currently participates in statewide meetings to ensure local efforts align with the [Washington State Opioid & Overdose Response Plan \(SOOR\)](#). Goals of the SOOR currently include:

1. *Prevent opioid misuse*
2. *Identify and treat substance use disorder*
3. *Ensure and improve the health and wellness of individuals that use drugs*
4. *Use data to detect opioid misuse/abuse, monitor illness, injury and death, and evaluate interventions*
5. *Support individuals in recovery*

Washington State receives 50% of all opioid settlement funds coming into the state, allowing them to coordinate a more robust set of strategies than can be delivered by smaller jurisdictions. Whatcom County continually identifies opportunities to align and support these strategies, and considers how state priorities impact local needs and gaps.

Strategies

A comprehensive set of strategies is necessary to address the broad needs created from the opioid crisis and from other related substance misuse. Priorities from the Opioid Task Force, the [Fentanyl Operations Plan](#), and from All Hands Whatcom have provided key guidance on potential services and strategies across the Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Aftercare (PITA) Continuum. Many of these concurrently align with the state plan.



Community assessment and strategic planning builds on work that has been done for decades in Whatcom County. Many longstanding services have relied on a variety of federal, state, and local resources. While a review of these efforts was essential in establishing priorities, this plan will directly focus on the use of opioid funds and is not intended to reflect services supported through alternative sources. It is also important to recognize that even with expanded resources, many gaps and needs still exist.

Requirements & Selection Criteria

Use of opioid settlement funding must follow requirements established in the [One Washington Memorandum of Understanding Between Washington Municipalities](#). A Regional Opioid Abatement Council (OAC) has been formed to provide oversight and ensure funds only support allowable uses and meet settlement requirements. Some essential requirements include:

- Ensuring there is opportunity for **community-based input on priorities** for Opioid Fund programs and services
- Reporting and **making publicly available all decisions** on Opioid Fund allocation applications, distributions, and expenditures
- Developing a methodology for **obtaining proposals** for use of Opioid Funds
- Using funds only for **approved purposes**. “Approved Purpose(s)” shall mean the strategies specified and set forth in the Opioid Abatement Strategies attached as Exhibit A.

Community needs exceed the resources available to address them. In addition to settlement requirements, a variety of factors were used to help identify initial community priorities ripe for positive outcomes. Through the application of additional selection criteria, local efforts have been strategically selected to ensure positive local impact. Some considerations proposed by the Opioid Task Force and county staff include, but is not limited to:

- Ensuring strategies address identified need(s) that were data-driven
- Providing balance across the Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Aftercare (PITA) continuum
- Considering impact vs. effort
- Determining if strategies are short, medium, or long-term strategies
- Assessing if it is a one-time expense or needs ongoing support
- Determining readiness and capacity of the community to implement (is this new or expanded service?)
- Building infrastructure and capacity that can be sustained
- Addressing equity in its selection and implementation (populations, geographies, etc.) and considers populations at higher risk for substance use
- Identifying if this is a best-practice or demonstrates effectiveness through research or data
- Integrating program evaluation (has evaluation tool and identified metrics to be addressed)
- Showing cost-benefit or cost-savings
- Determining funds are sufficient to address the identified needs or gaps
- Considering if the strategy is funded by another source (state, federal, grant, etc.) or if an alternative source is more appropriate
- Assessing if these funds can leverage other funds or resources to maximize impact

Strategies by PITA Continuum

Strategies	Prevention	Intervention	Treatment	Aftercare
Coalition prevention strategies	✓			
Youth substance use & mental health services		✓		
Public education and marketing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Naloxone	✓	✓	✓	✓
Medication lock bags	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supported employment services				✓
Community supported training and programming	✓	✓	✓	✓
Personnel (Opioid Response)	✓	✓	✓	✓
23-hour Crisis Center		✓	✓	

Outcomes and Evaluation

A Fentanyl Evaluation Plan was published in April of 2025 and identifies process evaluation, strategy evaluation, and population-level monitoring efforts. The plan details a range of strategies, indicators, and data sources that will be used to determine progress and success. The strategies identified in this spend plan are reflected in the evaluation plan. Though long-term efforts focus on the prevention and reduction of substance use, short-term efforts will immediately impact service access and utilization. Efforts will ultimately create a positive impact on families, the healthcare systems, schools, emergency

medical services, and the criminal justice system, including law enforcement, courts, and jails. Each program, service, or strategy will track metrics unique to their area of service. Service and outcome summaries will be made publicly available.

Cost Savings

Research-based strategies will be employed when available. An analysis by Washington State Institute for Public Policy details cost savings unique to individual programs and can be found at <https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/>. Some evidence-based strategies already operating in Whatcom County, for example, show a cost benefit of \$5,805 for each participant. Other interventions show a savings of an estimated \$18 per \$1 invested.

Budget

The strategies listed below were determined to be allowable uses of settlement funds and were directly connected to a locally identified priority.

	Allowable Use of Settlement Fund	Whatcom County Fentanyl Operations Plan alignment	Recommended Amount
Coalition prevention strategies	G4, G5	1B	100,000
Youth Substance Use & Mental Health Services	G10, G11	OTF	40,000
Public Education and Marketing	G1, G2, G7, H6, H7	1A	45,000
Naloxone	H1, H2, H4	1G, 2F	25,000
Medication lock bags	G5	1F	5,000
Supported employment services	B6	4d	25,000
Community Supported training and programming	K1, H3	1C	80,000
Personnel (Opioid Response)	Multiple	Multiple	223,494
Subtotal			543,494
10% admin			54,349
10% OAC			54,349
TOTAL			652,192

Through previous budgeting processes, \$1 million of opioid settlement funds was set-aside to support treatment services through the 23-hour crisis-facility. Those funds are not included in this budget but have already been approved by County Council.

Proposals

Service contracts, agreements, or purchases generated from these funds will follow county purchasing policies and procedures. Settlement funds require there is a process in place for “receiving and

reviewing proposals” for use of opioid funds. In Whatcom County, this may come in the form of a Purchasing Bid, Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Qualification (RFQ) solicitation, or through the MRSC roster. Entities are able to sign up to receive a text message or email when new bids are added at <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/Bids.aspx>. Once posted, agencies can submit proposals responding to a solicitation. Whatcom County Government is a member of MRSC Rosters and it is an efficient way to publish contract opportunities for services using a competitive roster process. Join the MRSC Roster at <https://members.mrscrosters.org/register>.

The focus of solicitations will continue to be based on community feedback. Consider participating in some of the community planning processes detailed earlier to help guide future work.

Next Steps

Engage in continuous collaboration with county department leadership and the executive office to identify needs, establish priorities, and ensure alignment with organizational goals. Opioid settlement funds will continue to be distributed to eligible government entities over the course of many years. The strategies listed in this plan are the first steps to utilizing funds to meet locally identified needs. Ongoing planning will help determine the feasibility of expanding or adding new strategies, identify new or emerging needs or gaps over time, and provide ongoing assessment of any shifts in capacity, readiness, and resources. In 2026, Whatcom County will:

1. Collect service and/or purchase bids or proposals (as appropriate)
2. Finalize program or service evaluation plans
3. Execute service agreements or purchases
4. Initiate and conduct full implementation of proposed strategies
5. Perform service and strategy evaluation
6. Determine if services have achieved outcomes and are appropriate for renewal or extension

The Strategic Planning Framework will continue to be utilized to provide essential structure for this multi-year process.