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RESEARCH & REPORTS

THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: CAN TELEHEALTH INCREASE ACCESS TO MEDICATIONS FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER AND OFFSET BARRIERS TO CARE?



Substance and opioid use disorder (SUD/OD) treatment remains limited in rural communities. This paper examines rural telehealth use, its impact on medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) provision, and issues that require attention for sustainment.

MAPPING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE STIGMA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SALIENT ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, AND BEHAVIORS IN RURAL-DWELLING PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS



Photo: Bozeman Daily Chronicle

The Gallatin County mobile crisis response team serves as a model for other rural communities seeking to enhance a critical component of its crisis response system. Critical to the program's success are four key focus areas: Proper identification of mental health calls, building trusted partnerships to increase effectiveness and efficiency, developing creative solutions that increase access to care, and leveraging data to improve performance.

PBS REPORT: HOW ALTERNATIVE POLICING IN RURAL AMERICA COULD WORK



Photo: PBS

This video examines how small towns in North Carolina are reshaping their response to mental health emergencies, homelessness, and low-level crimes. As communities across the country rethink traditional policing, it highlights an innovative program designed to support individuals in crisis. Viewers follow a social worker on a ride-along as she responds to a call about a homeless couple in distress, offering a rare glimpse into the reality of these encounters. (Video length: 8m16s)

RURAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE

Rural communities face unique challenges that impact their ability to deliver fair and equitable justice. Despite these challenges, rural communities rely on their many strengths to address the needs of their residents.

The National Center for State Courts, in partnership with Rulo Strategies, launched the [Rural Justice Collaborative \(RJC\)](#) to showcase the strengths of rural communities and highlight the cross-sector collaboration that is a hallmark of rural justice systems.

The work under the RJC is supported by a cross-sector advisory council composed of rural judges along with additional stakeholders in the justice, child welfare, and behavioral health systems. The advisory council guides and identifies innovative programs and practices.

PBS REPORT: RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE RETHINKING WOMEN'S INCARCERATION



Photo: PBS

This video explores the challenges faced by women returning to rural and small-town communities after incarceration, where limited resources create significant barriers to reentry. It highlights innovative solutions, such as farm-based housing programs like Benevolence Farm, along with expanding state initiatives aimed at reintegration. By focusing on these evolving efforts, the video sheds light on how rural areas are adapting to help formerly incarcerated women rebuild their lives. (Video length: 8m 29s)

ARTICLES

THE GOOD OL' BOYS AND THE BAD PEOPLE

According to studies by the Vera Institute of Justice, the jail rates for urban and rural counties were roughly equal at the start of the century. Thirteen years later, the rates of incarceration were 40 percent higher in rural counties than in urban metro areas. Between 2013 and 2019, jail populations dropped 18 percent in urban areas but increased 26 percent in rural areas. This article describes findings of a mixed methods research study that aimed to explain the differences in rural and urban incarceration rates. An overview of the research can be found [here](#).



MOVING BEYOND ADDICTION: IN EASTERN OREGON, DRUG USE OFTEN LURKS IN THE SHADOWS



Photo: Oregon Capital Chronicle

In rural corners of Oregon, fentanyl use and addiction thrives, and often in the shadows, with people camping in forests or other isolated spots. This article explores the implementation of a new deflection program to steer people into treatment to avoid a misdemeanor drug charge.

OPIOID ORPHANS: GRANDPARENTS STRUGGLE TO RAISE CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND



Photo: Photo by Michele Cohen Marill

This article examines the devastating impact of overdose deaths on children across Appalachia, where the opioid crisis has left a lasting mark on families. In West Virginia alone, nearly one in seven children, 13.7%—will experience the loss of a parent before turning 18, the highest rate in the nation. Experts describe the crisis as akin to losing an entire generation of parents. While opioid settlement funds largely focus on prevention and treatment, including naloxone training and overdose reversal kits, the vital role of grandfamilies and kinship caregivers remains largely absent from the discussion.

RESOURCES

COMMUNITY OPIOID OVERDOSE REVERSAL MEDICATIONS (OORMS) PLANNING TOOLKIT



This comprehensive resource is designed to help communities expand access to lifesaving medications like naloxone to reduce overdose fatalities. The toolkit provides actionable guidance for community leaders, public health professionals, and other partners to create effective overdose prevention and response strategies to improve local overdose reduction outcomes.

FIRST RESPONDER SUBSTANCE USE STIGMA MEASURES TOOLKIT



Assessing first responders' attitudes, including stigma, toward individuals with opioid use disorder (OUD) is essential, as their perceptions and interactions can directly influence patient outcomes. This toolkit provides measures to evaluate these attitudes, which have been utilized and, in some cases, validated across various responder populations including law enforcement, emergency medical services (EMS/EMTs), and fire personnel.

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT-BASED SUBSTANCE USE RESPONSE: A TOOLKIT FOR DEVELOPING, PLANNING, AND IMPLEMENTING A PEER RECOVERY COACH-LED PROGRAM

The Emergency Department-Based Substance Use Response Toolkit is designed to help healthcare systems address the ongoing overdose epidemic by identifying and supporting individuals at high risk. It provides guidance for health systems, state and local health departments, and rural hospitals on developing ED-based programs to reduce harm and prevent overdoses. The toolkit also offers strategies for engaging community stakeholders and aligning programs with hospital and population health priorities to ensure effective implementation and long-term success.

