

Larimer Regional Opioid Abatement Council Meeting

Documenter Name: Kevin Stearns

Agency: 200 Peridot Ave, Loveland, CO- Poudre River Conference Room

Date: May 25, 2023

Members Present

Tom Gonzales

Rupa Venkatesh

Councilor Steven Olson

Trustee Brian Mason

Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally

Trustee Cindy Younglund

Carol Block

J. Jones

Shane Ritter

Chris Jones

Others Present

Jamey Garmon

Arlo Cruz

Caitlin Lovett

David Ayraud

Alyson Williams

Gordon McLaughlin

Summary

The council held a hybrid meeting divided roughly evenly between in person and remote attendants. The three main areas of discussion, as laid out in the agenda, were between the Attorney General's financial and program status updates, the Local Opioid Summit, and Community and Lived Experience Feedback.

The goals of the meeting were centered around efficiently distributing funds and responding to the lessons learned from those who have lived experiences with addiction and how to move forward in order to successfully provide treatment that leads to long term recovery for those suffering from addiction.

Attorney General's Office Updates

Attached to the meeting packet is a breakdown of the Larimer County Opioid Abatement Council budget and expenditures. Half of the budget has been spent with the other half being spent after 6th month reports are made.

Though the budget was \$2 million this year, funding was frontloaded, and so the second year is estimated to have a \$1.2 million budget. Not everything will be fully funded as a result. The original settlement for the region over 18 years was \$14.7 million. The new settlement will be \$11.4 million over 14 years, coming to a total of \$26.4 million over 18 years. The plan is to step down funding until the programs are sustainable.

There will be an Opioid Abatement Summit Conference that is open to anyone who wants to register to attend, but members will have priority. They are hoping to have 2-3 members from each region attending.

The Attorney General's Opioid Response Unit is going to require reports from councils and local governments receiving direct allocation. They want a purpose and description for each expenditure for grantees and vendors provided funds which will be due March 15, 2024. This information will be put online.

Local Opioid Summit

Three overdose awareness events for Larimer County are coming from these funds. They will be in Loveland, Wilderness Park, and Fort Collins. These events will be focused on education and awareness as well as remembering the lost and celebrating those who have recovered. They will take place at the end of August (the 26th and 27th).

A motion was made to allocate up to \$15,000 towards an open opioid half day summit this fall organized by a subcommittee. The point of the summit is to educate and raise awareness in the community, give elected officials a chance to get information, and most importantly to focus on helping providers understand what organizations need. It should involve organizations like Narcotics Anonymous and the Recovery Center and aim to reduce the stigma of addiction. The motion to allocate these funds was passed unanimously.

Shane's Lived Experience

While in county jail, Shane was only able attend a single meeting for addiction recovery. Within an hour of getting out of jail, he was high, and it took an additional 7 years to get clean. The criminal justice system only got in the way. Shane attended hundreds of court ordered rooms and therapy sessions and they were not effective. 8 years on probation and the criminal justice system failed. After a couple years of homelessness, his family reached out and that was what finally led to recovery. His probation officer was essential for keeping him alive until that time. After finally getting into a halfway house, which was not available without felonies, Shane was able to overcome addiction through a 12 step program and has been sober for the past 2 years.

Shane identifies many problems that led to this long recovery. Pods in the jail were released at different times, causing logistic problems and staff shortages which prevented inmates from getting to meetings. Medically assisted treatment was far less effective than therapy based treatment. Detox facilities don't actually help to overcome addiction. Most of the opioid addiction originated from access to opioids caused by the overprescribing of them by doctors.

Jails are a great opportunity to be used as a place to detox, but they don't have enough staff or funds to facilitate that. Detox needs to be detached from law enforcement and court orders which stigmatize addiction. Funds would be better directed to treatment options for the incarcerated than in law enforcement (a point the attending law enforcement representative agreed on). There needs to be better control, qualifications, monitoring, and quality of care for treatment as well as more funding for transitional housing, such as Oxford House.

The focus for treatment should be on providing civility, support, and stability. Addiction stigma needs to be broken down.

Shane raised many questions for going forward. Who is giving treatment to overdose victims? Who is experiencing an overdose and survives? How many overdoses do they have before they get treatment? How are they finding treatment? Is it law enforcement, community programs, or something else? We need to get a clearer picture on what's working and what is not in order to allocate funds better.

Chris' Lived Experience

Chris is a mother who lost two adult children to addiction. When this happened, information was kept secret and this caused a lot of damage. She couldn't access her son's medical records until after he was dead. Transparency allows for communication, better research, and reduces addiction stigma. Nobody listened to her because her sons were adults, and back then, it was common for nobody to listen. Having a database of information to access is a huge step in the right direction. Similarly, having access to Narcan is a huge help.

Addicts who have just a single supportive person in their life can make it to recovery. 12 step programs are also important. They don't have to involve a personal God. Enablers, though, can cause a lot of damage. Enablers were responsible for getting her stepdaughter out of rehab facilities and keeping her from recovering. Nobody stopped them. The doctor in the ER ended up giving her stepdaughter Vicodin after she sobered up despite her liver being unable to process it.

Final Questions

What does it mean for a program to be sustainable enough to no longer require funding?
What is causing the staff shortages in social workers and jail workers?
Is there a plan to reduce the overprescribing of opioids?