

NOT ONE MORE

OUR VISION FOR OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS FOR ATLANTIC COUNTY

Introduction

We are a coalition of boots on the ground organizations, individuals, and community groups united in ending the overdose crisis and crushing the stigma of substance use. Together, our aim is to build power so impacted people can make decisions for themselves.

There must be inclusion of directly impacted people and communities, including people who are actively using drugs in deciding where the funds should go. People closest to the crisis must be included in the decision-making process on how funds are spent; to do otherwise would lead to ineffective interventions and poor outcomes. This must include active grassroots organizations, drug users, including those struggling with homelessness and incarceration. Involving these stakeholders in community conversations can lead to critical interventions to tackle the crisis.

Partners:

- Andy's Glow
- Feet In The Street (FITS)
- Angels in Motion
- National SeaChange
- New Jersey Resource Project
- New Jersey Organizing Project
- South Jersey Aids Alliance
- Worth Saving
- CoYOUunity
- Beacon House
- Hope Exists
- List in development

Our group believes that people who use drugs deserve a safe place to live and we should reduce any harm when possible. Recovery looks different for each person. We believe people who use medication to stop chaotic use are in recovery.

Why?

- We're losing too many people every day to preventable overdose. In 2024, our community lost 179 residents to overdose
- People who use drugs deserve dignity, respect, and autonomy to make choices that are best for them and should be celebrated for the progress they make.
- We need to fight stigma and dominant narratives that say people who use drugs are bad, irresponsible, and not worth saving.
- "If we wanted things to change, we knew we were the ones who needed to do it."
- Since 2019 to today, we've worked to end the overdose crisis in NJ by connecting ourselves and our loved ones to the resources we need to live healthier lives, and fighting for more when enough resources weren't there.

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To date, Atlantic County has received \$2,110,948.97 in opioid settlement funds and has used that funding to help our communities recover from the opioid crisis with dignity and respect. The county has surveyed and studied needs of residents struggling with recovery and identified five (5) goals/needs:

1. Sober living
2. Community outreach
3. Case management
4. Transportation
5. Rehab/service centers

Atlantic County is ahead of the curve with surveying to determine how to best serve the community with opioid settlement funds. In addition to just understanding what the community needs, the county has taken things a step further by hiring experts in relevant fields, employing social workers, community service aides, and mental health advocates.

Currently, the county has spent \$850,000 primarily on treatment, case management (i.e., sober living), and prevention.

Treatment - \$425,000

Case Management - \$340,000

Prevention - \$85,000

Atlantic County has identified key priorities and made significant progress, our vision is to guide additional investment towards essential resources that can further assist folks struggling with recovery. We believe the most beneficial and strategic uses of the opioid settlement funds will come from listening to directly impacted people and providing the evidence-supported care they need

We seek to create a vision for how to spend Atlantic County's opioid settlement fund dollars that we believe will further address the opioid crisis and is informed by our years of direct experience on the ground. We're often pushed out of society, deprived of basic needs like healthy food, clean water, quality housing, access to healthcare, clean laundry, education, and so much more. When we are denied a place to just exist, we lose access to the other pieces that make a dignified life. Based on conversations and input from directly impacted residents of Atlantic County, we have determined our top priorities/needs are:

- **Harm Reduction**
- **Transitional Housing (we changed the title which was formerly sober living)**
- **Resource Centers**

Harm reduction

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Proven public health interventions - including harm reduction - as well as hopeful innovations: There is overwhelming scientific support for a variety of proven public health interventions. Despite their role in reducing overdose deaths and improving lives, many - if not most - of these critical tools are unavailable to the vast majority of people, especially those in rural communities and cities or states ideologically opposed to them.

- Everyone should have access to all forms of FDA-approved medication for addiction treatment (MAT) and harm reduction services including syringe services programs and safer smoking supplies, naloxone, drug checking technology, and overdose prevention centers.
- We want a Mobile Van so Harm Reduction services can reach all the parts of Atlantic County that need them, given that transportation is a challenge for so many in our communities.

Housing

There cannot be a one size fits all approach to housing as folks in recovery have different housing needs based on where they are in their recovery journey. A vast majority of housing options now focus on short-term/detox housing. Safe and supportive recovery housing is fundamental to long-term recovery. As we see it, there are four categories of housing that need investment to provide the wrap around support our loved ones deserve:

- People who are using and waiting to get into some form of treatment
 - people who were asked to leave housing due to a return to use
- People who are in the middle (California sober, MAT, stopped using drug of choice, but use something else)
- People who are abstinent
- People who complete transitional housing
 - most houses only let you stay for so long, we need funding to help people live on their own
 - Provide rental subsidies for individuals in early recovery.

In the immediate term, we believe we should prioritize:

- **People who complete transitional housing**
 - **most houses only let you stay for so long, we need funding to help people live on their own**
 - **Provide rental subsidies for individuals in early recovery.**
 - **People who are using and waiting to get into some form of treatment**
 - **people who were asked to leave housing due to a return to use**

Resource Centers

What do we want?

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Navigating resources in Atlantic County is hard. There are resources but finding out what organizations offer what and getting around to each place is hard for someone who is trying to better themselves. We want either a huge Resource Center that houses offices for non-profits and offers an array of services or multiple centers throughout the county.

In the absence of affordable and quality housing for people struggling with using drugs, spaces are still needed to provide essentials for living with dignity and respect. Similar to community centers where people can socialize together, we need spaces that allow people to access kitchens, bathrooms & showers, private rooms for healthcare needs, meeting spaces for education.

In closing:

People who use drugs and who struggle with substance use disorder have a right to access healthcare that meets them where they are at, is evidence-based, affordable, based in dignity and respect, and empowers them to live healthier lives. This includes those on Medicare or Medicaid, or without insurance or reliable transportation - of whom there are many across under-resourced regions of NJ.

Every overdose is preventable. We have evidence-based medications that stop or reverse overdose, as well as treatments proven to reduce the risk of further overdoses in the future. Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) is the gold standard in treatment for substance-use disorder and has been shown to reduce the risk of preventable overdose deaths by 50%.

We need to crush the stigma around substance use disorder and welcome all pathways to recovery, including MAT and harm reduction. Care should center around providing dignity, compassion, and autonomy to people who struggle with substance use.

As the people directly impacted by the overdose crisis we are the experts on what we have experienced. **The knowledge and solutions we bring are key parts of ending this crisis. We are dedicated to offering our hard earned lessons and remembering our lost loved ones as we work together to end the overdose crisis.**

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Appendix:

Key Terms/Shared Understanding

Here's how we define some commonly used terms:

- **Abstinence:** Completely abstain from drugs and alcohol
- **Medication Assisted Treatment:** the use of FDA approved medications in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies to provide a whole patient approach to the treatment of substance use disorder.
- **Recovery:** Overcoming or managing one's disease(s) or symptoms—for example, abstaining from use of alcohol, illicit drugs, and non-prescribed medications if one has an addiction problem— and for everyone in recovery, making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional wellbeing.
- **Harm Reduction:** Meeting people where they are with kindness, respect and dignity in addition to any reduction of harm being caused to oneself or community either due to substance use or mental health; sum total benefits our loved ones and community

What are the opioid settlement funds?

In February 2022, New Jersey was awarded \$671 million from Johnson & Johnson, McKesson, Cardinal Health, AmeriSourceBergen, and Mallinckrodt for their shared roles in the opioid crisis. This settlement money could be spent over 18 years.

Other settlement funds are still coming with \$450 million from the Endo settlement and \$508.1 million from the CVS, Walgreens, Wal-Mart, Teva, and Allergan settlement still to be distributed to states.

The funding must go towards:

- Treating opioid use disorder (OUD)
- Supporting people in treatment and recovery
- Providing connections to care
- Addressing the needs of justice involved persons
- Addressing the needs of pregnant or parenting people who use drugs and their families
- Preventing over prescribing and ensuring the appropriate prescription of opioids by medical professionals
- Preventing problematic use of opioids
- Preventing overdose deaths and harms through harm reduction strategies
- Other goals such as supporting first responders, training, and cross-system collaborative efforts, and/or research

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Resources Available in Atlantic County: (to the best of our knowledge)

Oasis (South Jersey AIDS Alliance)

19 S Presbyterian Ave.

32 S Tennessee Ave.

southjerseyaidsalliance.org

609-347-1085

Harm reduction, Free HIV, Hep C, STD testing

Food pantry

Case management

Health insurance and social services

Drug purchasing assistance, PrEP navigation

Ryan White services Mental Health services

Help with Medications, Transportation

Angels In Motion

2 West Glendale Ave, Pleasantville

609-377-8929

aim.angelsinmotionnj@gmail.com

Outreach, Clothing

Blessing bags, Narcan distribution

Haircuts, Peer recovery support

Crossroads Fellowship

101 N 1st St Pleasantville Saturdays 9am-11am

Outreach recovery meeting Thursdays 7:00

Winter clothing clothing closet

Sleeping bags, Referrals to Social Services

Hats and gloves, Showers

Narcan distribution, Haircuts

Peer Recovery support, Household supplies

Salvation Army

22 S Texas Ave Atlantic City School

609-344-0660

salvationarmyusa.org

Food Pantry

After school programs

Christmas angel tree

Holiday community meals, Laundry, ministry

Showers

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Volunteers of America - Navigational Resource Center

26 S Pennsylvania Ave Atlantic City 609-246-6298

743 N Main St Pleasantville 609-383-3377

voa.org

Treatment, Employment, Housing

Adelaide's Place

2416 Arctic Ave. Atlantic City

Safe Space for women of domestic

Life skills enhancements, Social workers

Arts and crafts, Support to find housing

Health care

Beacon of Hope

Provides emergency shelter, resources, placement

Food and clothing

Hope Exists Foundation

Satellite office in the Health Plex in Atlantic City and Hope Exists conduct weekly outreaches.

As one of the first mobile outreach units in Atlantic County, here are the resources provided:

- Distributing Narcan and providing training on its use
- Connecting individuals to treatment and recovery services
- Offering transportation and funding for sober living
- Providing harm reduction tools, including xylazine and fentanyl test strips
- Distributing kindness kits with essential supplies