

Opioid Recovery Fund: What Counties Need to Know to Promote Community Health, Wellness and Resilience

By Sara Goldsby, MPH, MSW

South Carolina has been hard at work addressing the opioid crisis since 2014, when we—like the rest of the nation—realized we had a significant problem with prescription drug use. Since then, our state has made significant progress, but despite policy changes and multi-faceted public safety and public health efforts, we have seen overdoses rise. Communities nationwide and in South Carolina have felt the deep and complex impacts as the drug crisis has evolved in ways that we never could have anticipated.

In 2019, when our state saw the year-over-year increase in drug mortality level off and fall well below the increase seen nationally, we knew that our coordinated efforts had made headway against the problem. Then we experienced the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought on isolation, feelings of uncertainty, loss, and despair, driving increased use of alcohol and other drugs as a means of coping with a new reality.

Simultaneously, due to a vast infusion of the opioid fentanyl, in 2020 the illicit drug market became the most deadly the United States has ever known. Now, as we have turned the corner into 2023, there are virtually no South Carolinians who have not been close to the consequences of the addiction crisis.

With the luck of timing and by way of incredible litigation work, the first compensation from national settlements with opioid manufacturers, distributors, and pharmacy chains has made its way to our state. And the figures so far are substantial. Even with claims against additional manufacturers pending, the expected payments to the state and its political subdivisions are expected to total more than \$600 million over the next two decades. Furthermore, the wisdom of

the attorneys and experts who handled the national settlements have built in strict requirements that the money only be used for widely recognized and approved strategies to relieve the specific emergency we are experiencing.

Leaders across the field of addiction agree that we know what works to address opioid use disorder. Rigorous scientific research and evaluation have proven that the evidence-based programs and services outlined as the Core Strategies and Approved Uses of the finalized settlement

agreements work to prevent addiction, save lives, and foster long-term recovery. The challenge has been to scale up and spread these best practices and strategies for universal access. By investing the settlement funds in the targeted strategies, we can meet that challenge.

A first step is understanding the science of addiction, and in particular the unique science of opioid use disorder as a chronic relapsing brain disease that is preventable, treatable, not curable, and sometimes fatal. Just like people manage chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes, substance use disorders can become manageable with the right interventions, treatment, and support. If we were facing an emergency with any other chronic disease, we would be leaping to program and service solutions that focused on ushering people to wellness. Implementing the Core Strategies of the settlement agreements will do just that, keeping people alive as the top priority.

Strategies like having naloxone, the overdose antidote, on hand when and where people are at risk of overdose have already saved thousands of South Carolinians from accidental death. Expanding the availability of the three Food and Drug Administration-approved medications (methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone) that address opioid dependency, making them available without barriers to access, is saving lives in other states and, as a Core Strategy of the settlement, should also be one of our highest priorities. This expansion will take training and capacity building for our healthcare providers, EMTs, other first responders, and our criminal justice system, but the outcomes for lives stand to be most substantial. Of course, special attention should be paid to populations that are more vulnerable to the consequences of opioid use disorder, and so programs for pregnant and postpartum women, babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome, and incarcerated individuals are all important to develop.

When it comes to prevention in schools, many curricula and programs have been designed and evaluated to provide real outcomes in youth and adolescent behavior—preventing substance use and



Resources to Help Your County

South Carolina Opioid Recovery Fund Board

<https://scorf.sc.gov/>

SCAC's Opioid Solutions page

<https://www.sccounties.org/opioid-solutions>

S.C. Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services

opioid education and resources website:

<https://justplainskillers.com/>

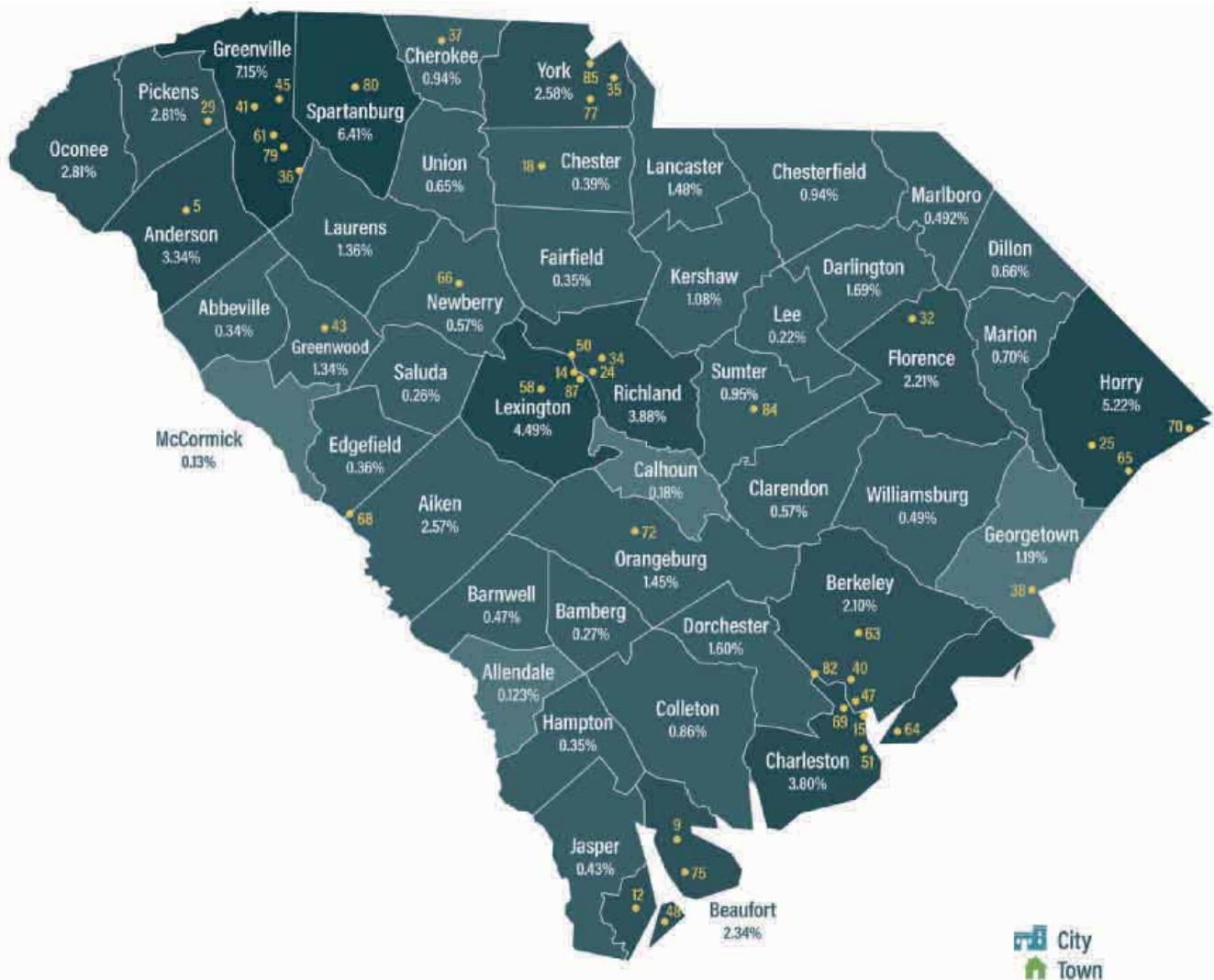
misuse. Information dissemination strategies like school assemblies are important but do not carry the value of robust programming like Botvin LifeSkills Training and the Strengthening Families Program, which prevent negative health outcomes by enhancing protective

factors related to social and learning competencies.

The guaranteed political subdivision funds of the opioid settlement give counties tremendous opportunity and responsibility to
(Continued on next page)

Allocations to South Carolina Counties and Cities

The following table is to be used by the South Carolina Opioid Recovery Fund Board for the purpose of allocating money in the Guaranteed Political Subdivision Subfund to the counties and cities of South Carolina.



2. Aiken 0.78%	32. Florence 1.01%	48. Hilton Head 0.23%	70. North Myrtle Beach 0.64%
5. Anderson 1.17%	35. Forest Acres 0.10%	50. Irmo 0.09%	72. Orangeburg 0.05%
9. Beaufort 0.08%	35. Fort Mill 0.17%	51. James Island 0.05%	75. Port Royal 0.02%
12. Bluffton 0.05%	36. Fountain Inn 0.20%	58. Lexington 0.23%	77. Rock Hill 1.31%
14. Cayce 0.26%	37. Gaffney 0.20%	61. Mauldin 0.43%	79. Simpsonville 0.35%
15. Charleston 2.30%	38. Georgetown 0.26%	63. Moncks Corner 0.20%	80. Spartanburg 1.19%
18. Chester 0.13%	40. Goose Creek 0.55%	64. Mount Pleasant 0.58%	82. Summerville 0.64%
22. Clemson 0.33%	41. Greenville 2.27%	65. Myrtle Beach 1.91%	84. Sumter 0.54%
24. Columbia 2.39%	43. Greenwood 0.03%	66. Newberry 0.03%	85. Tega Cay 0.04%
25. Conway 0.29%	45. Greer 0.56%	68. North Augusta 0.51%	87. West Columbia 0.39%
29. Easley 0.86%	47. Hanahan 0.23%	69. North Charleston 1.78%	

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cultivate communities where the necessary tools, services, and supports for recovery and wellness exist for individuals and families. The South Carolina Opioid Recovery Fund Board's website (available at <https://scorf.sc.gov/>) has all the available information on the settlement agreements, what funding is currently available, and how counties can apply for the Guaranteed Political Subdivision Subfunds. In addition, *South Carolina's Guide to Approved Uses for Investing Opioid Settlement Funds* offers even more detail on the intended uses of settlement dollars and was created as a technical resource for county leaders navigating strategies and program implementation.

Additional assets to leverage are the state's county alcohol and drug abuse authorities, which house expertise in the Core Strategies. Information on both county authorities and opioid treatment programs—which are South Carolina's publicly funded and trusted centers for services—can be found at <https://justplainkillers.com/>, a site that also offers additional county-level data and other South Carolina-specific information related to opioids.

As we come together with more resources than ever before for a very specific kind of public service, it is important to remember the mission and why we are charged with this work. Recognizing the value of the lives we serve—and the resilience that our South Carolina families and communities embody—is crucial to bringing hope and optimism to the work ahead. There may be no better place to begin to bring about the health, wellness, and recovery we expect to achieve in the coming years. 

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