

Colorado Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force

November 6, 2020, 10:00 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

Via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Attorney General Weiser, Vice-Chair Avani Dilger, Vice-Chair Matthew Baca, Robert Valuck, Liz Hickman, Adam Zarrin, Stazi Snelling, Julia Roguski, Wendy Buxton-Andrade, Matt Holtman, Peggy Heil, Rick Brandt, Jenny Wood, Kathryn Wells

Guests: José Esquibel, Heidi Williams, Bella Brache, Annemarie Braun, Felicia Schuessler, Danielle Felder, Kent MacLennan, Elyse Contreras, Allison Rosenthal, Bethany Pace-Danley, Kurtis Morrison, Gina Olberding, Jade Woodward, Kevin Hughes, Diane Carlson, Sam Bourdon, Jamie Feld, Claudia Zundel, Kyley Burress, Julia Stullken, Jessica Eaddy, Jack Reed, Adam Musielewicz, Jordan Smith, Libby Stuyt, Dawn Reinfeld, Alex Wolff, Elizabeth Pace, Lilian Chimuma, Kelsey Robinson, Charles Davis, Cindy Carter, Jessica Bass, Giana Calabrese, Kayla Tibbals

Welcome and Introductions

AG Weiser provided a welcome to begin the Task Force meeting. Vice-Chair Matthew Baca then asked members and guests to introduce themselves.

Updates from AG Weiser

Attorney General Phil Weiser shared his appreciation to the members of the Colorado Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force and the guests in attendance. He is encouraged by Colorado's engaged citizenry and leaders working together to address the real challenges of substance abuse affecting people all over the state. He also commended their use of data to develop and adapt their responses to substance abuse over time.

Review and Approval of Minutes

There was one correction to the August 2020 minutes. AG Weiser accepted the changes and moved to approve. He was seconded by Stazi Snelling, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Update: Opioid Litigation Settlement Discussions with Local Governments

Presented by Attorney General Phil Weiser and Heidi Williams, Director of Opioid Response, Colorado Department of Law

AG Weiser discussed the significance of opioid use disorder and overdose in Colorado, noting that Colorado has lost 7,000 people over the last ten years to overdoses on opioids, fentanyl, and heroin, and he shared that the trend line of drug overdose deaths per year has trended upwards. Currently, the state has only 30% of the drug treatment capacity needed to address the problem. Colorado has been in litigation with pharmaceutical companies related to their role in the opioid epidemic; the Department of Law seeks fair settlements that can help increase

Colorado's capacity to prevent opioid overdose and use disorder. To help Colorado prepare to make the best use of these funds, the Department of Law brought Heidi Williams onto his team as a Director of Opioid Response.

Heidi Williams discussed her outreach work in local governments around the state. She has talked with many members of local communities and governments, ranging from elected officials to local treatment providers working to address the opioid epidemic. She shared about an upcoming event on November 18, 2020 to be held in partnership with the Consortium, where they would be doing faith-based training for recovery support in faith communities. She invited all those in attendance to reach out to her if they are interested in connecting with the project.

View the presentation [here](#).

Discussion: Peer-to-Peer Teen Public Health Models

Presented by Kent MacLennan, Executive Director, Rise Above Colorado and Heidi Williams, Director of Opioid Response, Colorado Department of Law

Kent MacLennan presented on the work of Rise Above Colorado and its community partnership infrastructure. He shared that for over five years, the organization has worked to build a network that can be useful in working on collaborations between the state and localities. In 2015, with a grant from the Office of Behavioral Health, Rise Above Colorado created the Colorado Constellation Project – a network of communities across the state that locates partners and organizations in communities that work on youth substance abuse prevention – which allowed the organization to make a clear impact in opioid and prescription drug abuse prevention. Rise Above Colorado had an opportunity to expand this network with an OBH grant they received in July 2020, which they used to expand the Colorado Constellation Project into the southwestern and northeastern parts of the state.

Rise Above Colorado has also spent three years building a statewide norm campaign (the PCN Action Team) which gives an opportunity to cocreate messages tailored to local communities about misperceptions around substance use. The campaign focuses on data in those communities that complement the statewide data, and it uses these datasets to determine what is effective in certain communities for debunking the 'everyone is doing it' mentality and fighting youth substance abuse. The campaign is funded for two more years by a grant. They also have Community General Learning Partners that work on broad initiatives aiming to use existing resources to prevent substance abuse in local communities.

The partner model could provide a good framework for working with partners in these communities on youth substance abuse prevention by providing a model of partnership that spans urban, rural, and frontier communities. In many cases, Rise Above Colorado combines organizations that can work together at a local level. Kent MacLennan reminded the participants that they are always open to partnering with more organizations.

Stazi Snelling of Rise Above Colorado asked those in attendance about whether they knew of additional peer-to-peer youth prevention networks that exist for potential partnerships and connections. Avani Dilger, Task Force Vice-Chair, shared that her mentorship program in Boulder would like to get involved. Diane Carlson noted that there is a statewide education

committee that would be happy to connect with Rise Above Colorado. She also suggested that connecting with the Colorado Leadership Institute may be useful. Jade Woodard of the Colorado Substance-Exposed Newborns (SEN) Steering Committee mentioned that Youth Thrive, a program that helps youth become agents of change in their communities, would be a useful connection. Liz Hickman mentioned Communities That Care, which involves youth advisory groups in a multiyear process, as a good potential partner. Heidi Williams concluded the discussion by reminding participants to reach out to her if they would like to get involved in these efforts.

View the presentation [here](#).

High Potency THC Risks: Workgroup Discussion & Recommendations

Presented by Avani Dilger, SATF Vice-Chair, and Dr. Libby Stuyt, Addiction Psychiatrist

Avani Dilger summarized the work on this priority of the Task Force in 2020, stating that the Task Force aims to learn about and respond to the dangers of high THC concentrations in cannabis products. She then introduced Dr. Libby Stuyt, who presented on these dangers. Dr. Stuyt highlighted the lack of research into high-concentration cannabis products, the strong correlations between use of products with high THC concentration and behavioral and/or mental health issues, and the incomplete education youth and leaders have on these dangers. She recommended Colorado encourage or require more data be gathered on the effects of using high-concentration THC products. Dr. Stuyt also suggested placing a stronger emphasis on educating people who prescribe or sell these products on their risks.

Discussion began with AG Weiser, who observed that the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) produced a youth report that did not appear to examine use of high-concentration cannabis products in teens, even though they had data about a correlation between use of high-concentration THC products and youth who die by suicide. He asked if any of the participants knew whether the CDPHE is making public service announcements that boost the awareness of this correlation. He made a point of giving CDPHE a chance to respond to these points and share their thoughts on the issue of youth abuse of cannabis.

Elise Contreras of CDPHE responded to AG Weiser. She described how in August, CDPHE published a legislative report on the concentration of THC and its risks. In the report, they make a note of calling THC products “high concentration” as opposed to “high potency.” The report described how CDPHE faces challenges with emergency room and hospital data on the risks of using high-concentration THC products because the data is less detailed. It leaves the concentrations of THC products used by emergency room subjects unclear, and it also leaves it unclear as to whether the products themselves cause health risks.

In response to Dr. Stuyt’s recommendation of restoring funding to promote education and data collection, Ms. Contreras noted that there was a funding cut of 80% this year to the marijuana education and prevention program, which was a huge blow to the department’s education and public service capacity. CDPHE itself, she noted, is also facing budget cuts, and though they hope to improve their data on the risks of using high-concentration THC products, they cannot do it without the proper resources. AG Weiser noted to Vice-Chair Matthew Baca the importance of looking further at the inadequate funding of the CDPHE.

Dr. Robert Valuck brought up the lessons to be learned from prescription drug regulation and FDA regulation. He discussed the different frameworks used to deal with medicinal versus recreational substances and proposed that Colorado decide whether cannabis is to be considered a medicine or whether it is truly recreational. This decision would help the state to adopt either a medicinal or recreational framework for regulation – if the state sees cannabis as medicine, it should regulate it like it regulates medicine, and if the state sees cannabis as a recreational substance, it should regulate it like it regulates recreational substances. If cannabis is determined to be a medicine in Colorado, Dr. Valuck proposed, the state needs to enforce transparent labeling, standardize dosages, and make sure physicians’ prescriptions for marijuana include dosages that consider THC content and administration methods while abiding by prescription laws. AG Weiser agreed, adding that this framework could be useful to address the fact that some CBD products are still not regulated and may include THC without disclosing this on labels.

Diane Carlson of Smart Colorado encouraged participants to be aware of how the recommendations can address serious issues like tax evasion and the disproportionate amount of sales taking place on the medical market (where twice as many cannabis products are sold than on recreational markets). She pointed out that the state still cannot monitor people to see whether they are going from store to store and buying more cannabis than is allowed, which raises concerns that products on the legal cannabis market may be bought in excess and sold on the illegal cannabis market to underaged people.

Liz Hickman pointed out that the Behavioral Health Task Force is not under the CDPHE and that it instead evolved elsewhere. High-level executives have been involved in the Task Force and have published hundreds of pages in a task force document. She said the document did not focus on drug-of-choice issues regarding any specific drugs but that there could be an opportunity in the future to look at specific tensions between cannabis as medicine and cannabis as a recreational substance.

Dawn Reinfeld added that there are many new cannabis products available to eighteen-year-olds with medical marijuana cards that have not been scientifically proven to be safe or effective medically and which also may contain ingredients that are potentially harmful, like propane and butane.

AG Weiser summarized the previous conversation, focusing both on the illegal marijuana market and on the connection between high-concentration THC products and teen suicide. He also posed the question of what oversight exists for doctors giving teens medical marijuana cards irresponsibly.

Next steps to consider:

- Continue to inform the Task Force on issues related to high concentration THC products and their impact on individuals
- Follow-up with whether CDPHE is implementing any public awareness activities, or providing any data related to the relationship between marijuana use and youth suicide.
- Follow-up with CDPHE on funding needs for promoting education and data collection related to marijuana due to previous funding cuts.

- Provide CDPHE with current recommendations from the SATF and seek their feedback to share with the SATF.

Updates from Committees

Presented by Vice-Chair Matthew Baca and Committee Chairs

Committees provided brief updates, with Vice-Chair Matthew Baca noting that the same updates would be available in the 2020 Annual Report and did not need to be reviewed exhaustively in the current meeting, to ensure enough time for the remaining items on the agenda.

View the Annual Report [here](#).

SBIRT Advisory Council: Presented by Bethany Pace-Danley, SBIRT in Colorado Manager, Peer Assistance Service

The SBIRT Advisory Council has over 50 members from across the state. There are currently two work groups of the Council:

- The Adolescent Work Group is making a working with the Colorado Chapter of the American Pediatric Association on a paper regarding adolescent alcohol and other drug use and SBIRT.
- The Education Work Group sent a proposal to the executive director of Colorado Community College System for improving and expanding the practice of SBIRT in community college settings. This effort is on hold due to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

SBIRT in Colorado continue to provide SBIRT resources and training to practitioners across the state and is working a workplace initiative to expand SBIRT in multiple settings.

Statewide Epidemiological and Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW)

Presented by Allison Rosenthal, DUI Statistical Analyst, Colorado Department of Public Safety
The SEOW is working on finalizing Epi Profiles related to alcohol, marijuana, opioids, and tobacco and are schedule for publication in early 2021. The SEOW will report on the profiles at the February Task Force meeting. Also, Ms. Rosenthal announced that the Colorado Department of Public Safety released a report in DUI driving and drugs.

Substance Exposed Newborns (SEN) Steering Committee

Rule making is occurring in the Colorado Department of Human Services related to plans of safe care legislation that was passed during the 2020 legislative session, which was a priority piece of legislation recommendation. The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders work group produced a gaps analysis report that was released. Also, a report is being finalized for the Data Linkage Project regarding tracking data in multiple state data systems related to substance exposed children and their mothers. The SEN Steering Committee is also working a new strategic plan with input from family advocates and the plan will be presented to the Task Force in early 2021.

Consortium Legislative Survey Data

Presented by José Esquibel, Director, Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention

José Esquibel informed those in attendance that the Consortium and the Colorado Health Institute released the *Colorado Opioid Response Blueprint* to help guide decisions on how to fight substance abuse on the local level. It includes a survey to help localities allocate funds in effective ways tailored to their circumstances. He also mentioned the Consortium's upcoming faith leaders training to help those working with their congregation and helping people in recovery from addiction. The first training for this was scheduled for 12/18/2020, and he assured attendees that the Department of Law would send an announcement to the Task Force members and guests so that more people could come to the webinar. José also noted that the Consortium's grant writing program to help small rural nonprofits has been wildly successful, having spent around \$200,000 to secure awards of \$5 million.

Annual Report Update and Timeline

Presented by Vice-Chair Matthew Baca

Vice-Chair Baca gave a status update on the Task Force Annual Report, which is now publicly available [here](#).

Closing Comments and Adjournment

A final call for questions or comments was issued.

Meeting concluded.