

Colorado Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force

February 5, 2021, 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, Peggy Heil, Jenny Wood, Kathryn Wells, Lindsay Myers

Guests: José Esquibel, Heidi Williams, Bella Brache, Annemarie Braun, Felicia Schuessler, Alex Wolff, Meagan Hillman, Elizabeth Pace, Tony C, Sharon Liu, Adam Musielewicz, Alex Wolf, Gina Olberding, Allison Rosenthal, Annmarie Baun, Emily Van Doren, Giana Calabrese, Gina Olberding, Jack Reed, Jade Woodard, Jessica Eaddy, Kavitha Kyleson, Megan Hillman, Michelle Web, Peter Rumbach, Steve Kotech, Sam Bourdon, Srgt Andy Feaster

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.

Review and Approval of Minutes

There were no corrections to the February 2021 minutes, they were unanimously approved by the Task Force.

Presentation: Urgent Bulletin Regarding Proliferation of Counterfeit Oxycodone Pills in the Community

Presented by DEA Task Force Officer Tyler Jenkins and Senior Assistant Attorney General Annemarie Braun

Ms. Braun introduced Tony Collette, who subbed in for Officer Jenkins. Tony explained that the DEA strike force is one of the highest performing teams in Colorado, focusing on the sources of supply of drugs, such as international supply chains. They have been involved in high profile supply cases, and he gave an update on the supply aspect of the counterfeit oxycodone pills.

Counterfeit oxycodone has become extremely profitable, leading Mexican drug labs to start producing these counterfeits that are made of fentanyl instead of oxycodone because they were cheaper to make—but just as easy to sell—as real oxycodone. These counterfeits are also cheaper for the end user to buy.

Fentanyl deaths have jumped significantly in recent years, and overdoses can happen to anyone.

Anmarie asked Tony to share how many pills the distributor Tony talked to took a day, and Tony said around 30-50 tablets a day, even though they have no clue how much fentanyl is in these tablets.

The panel received questions, and the Task Force began a short discussion about fentanyl-laced substances in Colorado. With the explosion of substance use in 2020, members of the Task Force discussed the need for increased public education and additional law enforcement training.

Discussion: Task Force Priorities in 2021

Led by Attorney General Phil Weiser

Attorney General Weiser reiterated that the opioid epidemic has worsened in the pandemic, and it's likely we will see some of the highest numbers of overdoses and deaths in 2020. The Department of Law has a settlement with McKinsey that will provide about \$10M to the state to address this issue. Additionally, Task Force members and guests discussed potential public interest campaigns, Narcan solutions, and local government collaboration. There are ongoing negotiations with local governments about the most effective way to address the opioid crisis at the local level and setting a framework for the distribution and use of opioid settlement dollars. Attorney General Weiser shared a draft of the county regions as of 2-3-21.

Commissioner Wendy Buxton-Andrade mentioned that there is some good work occurring in some counties through the Rural Communities Opioid Response funding from the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration, but some regions have no community planning efforts in place. There is a need to help local government elected officials in those area understand what is and what is not available and occurring in their communities to address the opioid crisis.

José Esquibel emphasized the need for Task Force members and guests to work through their respective networks to inform local elected official about what is occurring in their communities to address the opioid crisis and/or what is needed.

Update: Opioid Settlement

Presented by Director of Opioid Response Heidi Williams

Attorney General Weiser began the update with compliments to Heidi Williams and the work she has done so far in opioid response. Ms. Williams is building relationships across the state, cataloging regional resources and services, and preparing the framework for funds coming in to abate the crisis.

The funds from the settlement the AG discussed has been split up into four pots: local governments, regional abatement strategies, regional infrastructure, and state-wide initiatives. More details regarding the funding and funding pots will be available soon.

Human Connection as Harm Reduction: Longmont Public Safety's Approach to Behavioral Health Response and Case Management

Presented by Emily Van Doren, Dan Eamon, Sergeant Andy Feaster, Michelle Webb

Emily Van Doren, Michelle Webb, and Andy Feaster – all part of Longmont Public Safety – presented the case management team's philosophy that "human connection is harm reduction." The presentation shared successful stories of the power of connection, and they build on these stories with promising preliminary data.

They first shared the story of Annabel, one of her participants. Annabelle grappled with her family's substance abuse as a young person. As a case manager, she met Taylor, a woman with similar life experience. Annabelle navigated her relationship with Taylor professionally, not sharing her own life story until Taylor had let her in. When she eventually did share with Taylor, it strengthened their connection. Ms. Van Doren noted that the story is an important example of how genuine trust, community-based outreach, and connection can be crucial for helping people heal. Their team is committed to going to the people they serve.

Just as they place an emphasis on communal connection and shared humanity with the participants they serve, they bring this intention into their relationships with law enforcement. Trying to understand how law enforcement feel when they encounter people with whom they make connections with but feel powerless to help uplift (powerless to break the cycle) led Ms. Van Doren to better understand the value and challenges law enforcement face as they help those with SUD.

They discussed the concept of 'our own' – we hire our own, we help our own. Having the law enforcement, case managers, and others so close physically and by connection under the same roof of the public safety department has helped them offer better services. At the end of the day, the ability for a police officer to pick up the phone and call a member of their team as opposed to an outside source is crucial. They advise that if you want someone to help address the issues you're working on, build them up and make them a part of your team.

Ms. Van Doren then shared some key findings in data (slide titled "Key Findings from 2020 Preliminary Evaluation"). They've seen a 59% reduction in the number of legal incidents after first contact with case management. They've seen a 50% reduction in arrest rate after first contact. Thirty-five percent of participants were not arrested again, and 32% did not receive other summons after first contact. Additionally, they saw a 25% reduction in ER transports, specifically for those who engaged in peer counseling within the program.

Liz Hickman shared her great admiration and appreciation for the presentation by Longmont Public Safety. She noted that in her area of Colorado, there is no public service entity that could roll out the program that Longmont has. So, smaller communities can instead focus on strong partnering relationships, and this is not a bad option.

SEOW Epidemiological Profiles

Presented by Allison Rosenthal

Allison Rosenthal discussed the new 2021 Colorado Epidemiological Profiles, highlighting a few of them, key data points, and helpful uses of them. The profiles cover alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, opioids, and demographics, and were developed to be used in similar settings as the Task Force, to start conversations around substance abuse.

The profiles are available [here](#).

Exploring Resources for Supporting Increased Needs Around Substance Abuse During COVID-19

Presented by Vice Chair Avani Dilger

Vice Chair Dilger began discussing the mental health impacts of COVID-19, noting a 34% increase in benzodiazepines in just a few months and that in her view these prescriptions are likely in part unnecessary. She proposed using AcuDetox for mental health—a certain type of pressure pointing in the ear to reduce craving for drugs. She showed a clip of how AcuDetox is used at NaturalHighs in Boulder, both in the justice system and on campus at CU Boulder. She noted that three months ago, the law changed in Colorado to say that anyone in Colorado who goes through a 3-day AcuDetox training is allowed to administer it. She then welcomed Morgan Huffner, a peer mentor in her program, to share more about AcuDetox, what it has done for her, and what being a peer mentor has done for her own recovery.

Ms. Huffner described how after her first AcuDetox helped center her and help her function immediately. Similarly, being a peer mentor has helped her be there for people who are struggling like she used to. It helps her remember the value of recovery, and she loves helping people take their next steps. She incorporates movement, meditation, reiki, and AcuDetox to strengthen her own sobriety and help others strengthen theirs

Vice Chair Dilger let attendees know that she interviewed Ms. Huffner on her podcast – “This Badass Sober Life.” She recommended the podcast to all struggling with substance use. She also showed people how to get trained in AcuDetox by registering online. She shared resources for how to deal with trauma on her slides to be shared with the Task Force members. She

announced an upcoming documentary discussion on *Medicating Normal*, open to anyone online, and she encouraged participants to connect with her and NaturalHighs.

Liz Hickman thanked Vice Chair Dilger and noted that she had not known about the recent change in law that makes it easier to get trained. She said this option will open up more of their providers to utilize it, and she is happy to see the step forward.

Diane Carlson thanked Vice Chair Dilger and Ms. Huffner for sharing their story, and she thanked Vice Chair Dilger for her leadership on the Task Force and in spreading the word about AcuDetox.

Closing Comments and Adjournment

Vice Chair Matthew Baca thanked everyone and called for last comments before wrapping up. He asked Stazi Snelling to share her brief announcement. Ms. Snelling let everyone know that Rise Above Colorado just released their new youth survey, and she sent the link to members: <https://riseaboveco.org/resources.html#community>.

Meeting concluded.