



Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force Meeting Minutes

August 4, 2023

Membership Present: Phil Weiser, Vanessa Deveraux, Lesley Brooks, Rick Brandt, Joy Hart, José Esquibel, Kaole Vang, Brandon Davis, Robert Valuck, Jamie FitzSimons, Tonya Wheeler, Ingrid Bakke, Dante Gonzales, Matt Holtman, Erin Crites, Kathryn Wells, Andres Guerrero, Julia Roguski.

DOL Staff: Jamie Feld, Jack Patterson

Guest attendees: Eric Barker, Jessica Eaddy, Jennifer Mackender, Kristen Carpenter, Julia Stullken, Christina Green, Lauren Gase, Renee Dougweiler, Barbara Gabella, Kylie Yocum, Hannah Nibauer, Tim Kitchens, Henny Lasley, Kent MacLennan, Joanna Beletic.

I. Introductions and Updates

Welcome to New Dept. of Law Leadership

Attorney General Weiser congratulated the newly appointed Deputy Attorney General for Community Engagement Vanessa Deveraux and Opioid Response Director Jamie Feld and thanked them for their leadership and contributions to the Department of Law and State of Colorado.

Reminder: 2nd Annual Colorado Opioid Abatement Conference (Aug. 16-18) in Montrose, Colorado.

Attendees introduced themselves.

Overview of 2023 Opioid Abatement Conference

Jamie Feld highlighted her gratitude for the opportunity to lead the Opioid Response Unit within Department of Law and thanked Deputy Attorney General for Community Engagement Vanessa Deveraux.

The 2023 Conference will be hosted in Montrose, Colorado (August 16-18, 2023).

Jamie Feld provided an overview of the [agenda for the 2023 conference](#).

Colorado received the Excellence in the Application of the Opioid Litigation Principles Award, designated by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Attorney General Weiser reiterated the vision of empowering regions, encouraging experimentation, to work on the ground level, and to learn from one another. The conference will serve as an important venue for these goals. One of the goals is to be authentic about the volume of work and acknowledging that the settlement funds will not address every need across the state, but it serves as an important start.

Vanessa Deveraux thanked Jamie Feld and the ORU for their work in planning the conference and encouraged the attendees to invite their networks and spread the word about the conference.

José Esquibel spoke to the importance of recognizing the regions for their ability to apply the Bloomberg Principles in their governance decisions with settlement funding. Since the money is limited, it is important to recognize best practices and principles.

Phil Weiser acknowledged Lesley Brooks who was a standout leader in this work before the settlement framework came into existence.

Tonya Wheeler shared about her role with the Advocates for Recovery Colorado and the All-Recovery Meeting that will take place during the conference. The all-recovery meetings are for general support of those in recovery, as well as friends and allies. The invitation is open to all conference attendees.

Jamie Feld reiterated the Attorney General's commitment to addressing the teen mental health crisis.

II. Presentations and Discussion

CDPHE Data Presentation on Excessive Alcohol Use - Julia Stullken (CDPHE)

Julia Stullken presented on Excessive Alcohol Use to the Task Force, including prevalence data, risk factors, demographic factors, emergency room data, and community impacts associated with excessive alcohol consumption in Colorado.

Key themes from the presentation include: (1) Alcohol is the most prevalently used substance in Colorado, (2) Binge drinking is not just a youth or young adult issue, but younger people are more likely to binge drink when they consume alcohol, and (3) Alcohol screening in hospital settings could provide a more complete picture of alcohol related harms.

Jamie Feld expressed surprise by the lower frequency of binge drinking among age demographic 18-24 and the fact that volume of alcohol consumption for the 25-34 age demographic is higher than the 21-24 range.

José Esquibel spoke of an uphill challenge regarding the high overall prevalence of excessive alcohol consumption and the importance of elevating this discussion to create community awareness.

Julia Stullken highlighted the plethora of resources and campaigns targeting young people, but since a primary factor for excessive alcohol use in young adults depends on whether adults in the home drink, it is important to reframe the topic. Even though it is a legal substance for those 21+, there are still associated harms that should be communicated.

José Esquibel spoke about the role of the SATF in producing reports that can inform the legislature on these topics.

Tonya Wheeler inquired about how frequently alcohol is combined with opiates. Presenters acknowledged a lack of specific data addressing this topic but highlighted that alcohol can be destructive in combination with opiates.

Jamie Feld highlighted that programs targeted at opiates and alcohol abuse, collectively, are an allowable use for funding.

José Esquibel invited SATF to generate data on alcohol abuse to bring to the task force and incorporate into a report to the legislature.

Tonya Wheeler asked if 5280 High Schools, a recovery high school in Denver could provide additional data around this topic.

Julia Stullken mentioned that the majority of those who report excessive drinking are not diagnosed with an alcohol use disorder.

CDPHE Data Presentation on Drug Overdose and Fentanyl – Barbara Gabella and Kylie Yocum (CDPHE)

Key Highlights:

- 7% of all overdose deaths from July 2019-December 2021 had at least one bystander present (data by SUDORS).
- Rate of Emergency Department visits for nonfatal synthetic opioid overdoses quadrupled from 2020 to 2022.
- Nonfatal overdoses involving synthetic opioids has shifted from a concentration in urban regions to a statewide prevalence, according to data from 2021-2022.
- 19% of students in public high schools report it is “sort of easy” or “very easy” to get prescription drugs without a prescription (2021).
- 2% of youth 12-17 years old report prescription pain reliever misuse in the past year (2021).
- In 2022, psychostimulant overdoses (including meth) were 11.8 deaths per 100,000 persons, an increase from 8.9 deaths in 2019, but a slight decrease from 12.5 deaths in 2021.
- Xylazine and Nitazenes are emerging threats within the opioids landscape.
- **In th**e category *fatal overdose age-adjusted rates by race (2018-2020)*, Black and African American individuals experienced the highest rates of fatal overdoses.
- American Indian and Alaska-Native Coloradans are at the highest risk of meth-related overdose.
- 15-24 years of age is the highest rate demographic for “any opioid overdose (prescription or heroin),” while 25-34 is the highest rate demographic for “prescription opioid overdose.”
- 25-34 years of age is the highest rate demographic for cocaine involved overdose, while 35-44 years of age is the highest rate demographic for methamphetamine involved overdose.
- Presenters shared geographic overdose map data.
- Data can be accessed through the CDPHE Drug Overdose dashboard.

Questions:

- Since 7% of overdose deaths involve a bystander, does that mean 93% of overdose deaths happen when the individual is alone? Presenters confirmed yes.
- Does the data set on emergency room visits include overdose reversals from naloxone? Presenters suggested that those incidents would not be counted unless the patient was taken into an emergency room. Although, emergency room staff do have access to certain data systems to track whether Naloxone was used by EMT staff.

José Esquibel encouraged a voluntary central tracking system to be used to better understand the success data of naloxone.

Robert Valuck encouraged integration between ODMaP and OpiRescue for naloxone use data (broken down by county). The ODMaP software allows for mass notifications to end users of the app and gathers valuable data from laypersons who administer naloxone in crisis scenarios. There are national efforts to increase data collection associated with ODMaP and OpiRescue.

José Esquibel encouraged naloxone use data tracking to be put on future agendas for the Colorado Opioid Abatement Council (COAC) and Regional Opioid Abatement Councils (ROACs).

José Esquibel acknowledged that criminalization of drug users may be a related factor causing the disproportionate number of overdoses among Black Coloradans and invited the task force to join the work/partnerships with the Black community leadership.

Addressing Health Disparities – Lesley Brooks

Key Highlights:

- Health disparity is defined as “a particular type of health difference that is linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage that adversely affects groups of people who have systematically experience greater obstacles to health” (Healthy People 2030).
- Health disparities are differences between groups in health insurance coverage, affordability, access to and use of care, and quality of care.
- Structural inequities, structural racism, and health inequities are directly linked.
- Health disparities occur across a broad range of dimensions beyond race and ethnicity alone.
- Call to Action: We cannot address health disparities without complete, accurate, valid, and reliable demographic data.
- We must understand who the impacted persons are and their identities.
 - o Zip code plays a predominant role in health disparities.
- These conversations are difficult, but crucial, to give our communities the tools they need to address health disparities.

Jamie Feld thanked Lesley Brooks for her leadership and insights on this important topic.

CDPHE representatives highlighted the versatility of the overdose dashboards to understand demographic data factors.

José Esquibel inquired about the status of CDPHE and BHA’s health equity reports.

Julia Stullken acknowledged there need to be more reliable ways to collect data, especially for nonfatal overdose data. She also spoke to the pressures for data collectors to collapse and consolidate demographics when reporting, which can sometimes undermine health equity efforts.

The group acknowledged that there are incongruencies between local and state data and a broader need to verify data across these domains.

Lesley Brooks said the metrics that are measured also vary across organizations, state data sets, and local data sets. The SATF should consider supporting these efforts to align data measurement across state agencies and organizations in Colorado to better address health disparities.

José Esquibel said SATF may have to engage federal delegation as well. Action item: consider bringing the health disparities plan by Colorado Black leadership coalition to a future SATF meeting.

Vanessa Deveraux emphasized the importance of supporting under-resourced and under-represented communities with funding that will be distributed throughout the coming years.

Lesley Brooks highlighted the difficulties small organizations (who focus on serving marginalized communities) face. Many funders rate organizations based on risks, but should consider changing the way they evaluate organizations, focusing on potential rather than labeling these companies as high-risk without considering the full scope of their impact.

Jamie Feld highlighted that the grants coordinators in DOL are considering factors/language to address health disparities and that there must be continued emphasis on health disparities throughout scoring rubrics.

HB22-1326 Data Analysis – Lauren Gase

CDPHE wanted to ensure a robust stakeholder engagement process prior to collecting data.

The agency is using 3 methods: (1) comprehensive literature review, (2) interviews with 50+ stakeholders from diverse fields, and (3) an assessment of potential data sources.

3 areas of focus for implementing legislation: (1) acute needs through first-response system, (2) increase criminal penalties for possession of 1-4 grams of fentanyl, and (3) public health and harm reduction approaches for disparately impacted populations.

CDPHE welcomes the input of the members and attendees at the SATF meeting.

III. Adjournment

Final Announcements

José Esquibel reminded SATF, as their annual reports are released, to consider what recommendations can be translated into legislative changes.

Next meeting: November 3, 10:00am-12:00pm MST.

SATF motioned to adjourn. Meeting adjourned.