

Colorado Opioid Abatement Council (COAC)

Assistance Committee

Meeting #21

February 11th, 2025
2:00pm – 3:00pm

Membership Present: *Josh Blum, Terry Hofmeister*

DOL Staff: *Jamie Feld, Jack Patterson, Christian Dykson, Natalie Sandoval*

Guests:

Welcome and Introductions – ORU Staff

The meeting was called to order by ORU staff, who welcomed attendees and introduced new committee member, Commissioner Terry Hofmeister. ORU staff acknowledged that some members were absent due to scheduling conflicts and provided an overview of the meeting agenda.

The role of the Assistance Committee was discussed in depth, with a focus on its growing importance in supporting local governments and regions with opioid settlement fund management.

COAC Recommendations & Resources

ORU staff provided an update on the 2024 COAC recommendations and the accompanying resource document designed to guide local governments and regions in maximizing opioid settlement funds. The recommendations were based on principles from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and were structured to ensure the effective, evidence-based, and sustainable use of funds. The updated recommendations document now includes links to a number of nationally recognized resources to help stakeholders implement best practices.

Committee members praised the comprehensive nature of the resource but discussed ways to make the information more digestible and accessible, particularly for smaller municipalities with limited administrative capacity. The committee agreed that ongoing updates and refinements would be necessary to keep the recommendations relevant as the opioid crisis response evolved.

The Committee engaged in a discussion on how to effectively communicate equity-focused recommendations while ensuring that language remained accessible and non-polarizing. Dr. Josh Blum noted that the emphasis in the equity language is on helping and engaging with individuals impacted by the opioid crisis. Some terms, such as "intersectional approach," were flagged as potentially unclear, leading to a recommendation that alternative language such as "holistic" or a focus on "historically underserved" could be used instead.

The discussion emphasized that funding should prioritize under-resourced communities that have been disproportionately affected by the opioid crisis, including rural areas and lower-income urban neighborhoods. The importance of cultural competence in service delivery was also highlighted, ensuring that funding allocations reflect the needs of diverse populations.

The Committee reaffirmed the commitment to maintaining a focus on equity was essential. They highlighted that terms should be chosen to be clear and understandable to the lay public. ORU staff planned to refine the language and present updated wording at the next meeting.

Supplanting

ORU staff presented an analysis of fund supplantation, based on national watchdog reports, to clarify how opioid settlement funds should be used. It was noted that the Colorado MOU requires 100% of funds to be used for forward looking strategies:

At the state level, supplantation is explicitly prohibited in accordance with state fiscal rules – meaning funds cannot replace existing funding for opioid-related services. At the regional and local government levels, supplantation is discouraged but not strictly prohibited.

The Committee discussed the challenges of defining and monitoring supplantation, particularly for smaller municipalities with limited financial oversight capacity. Concerns were raised about the administrative burden of enforcement and whether stringent supplantation requirements could unintentionally hinder flexibility in fund allocation.

ORU staff planned to further refine guidance on this issue to provide clearer expectations while maintaining flexibility for local governments.

COAC Communications

ORU staff presented on potential ways to improve communication between ORU, regional councils, and local governments regarding opioid settlement fund policies, updates, and best practices. ORU staff emphasized the need for clear, consistent, and accessible communication to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.

Communications tools identified include:

- Memos and Notices – For critical policy updates and compliance requirements, distributed to fiscal administrators and regional leads.
- Emails and Newsletters – Monthly or bi-monthly updates summarizing key information, deadlines, and success stories.
- Regional Forums and Webinars – Using existing meetings for discussions, training, and knowledge sharing, with webinars for broader accessibility.
- FAQs and Resource Library – A centralized hub for guidance documents, templates, and commonly asked questions.
- One-on-One Support – Technical assistance sessions for local governments needing individualized guidance.

Key barriers included limited administrative capacity, email overload, and varying levels of engagement across local governments.

ORU staff committed to drafting a formal communication plan, exploring an online resource platform, and ensuring ongoing improvements based on feedback. A draft plan will be presented for review at the next meeting.

Data Discussion

ORU staff noted that a discussion on data collection, reporting, and evaluation was on the agenda but opted to table it for the next meeting due to time constraints.

ORU staff committed to preparing materials and potential data frameworks for review at the next meeting on April 8, 2025.

FAQ Development

ORU staff discussed the need to manage frequently asked questions (FAQs) to provide local governments and regions with quick, accessible guidance on opioid settlement fund usage. They noted that many inquiries come from municipalities regarding allowable expenses, reporting requirements, and administrative costs.

One recent question discussed was whether opioid settlement funds could be used for job programs for the homeless, particularly those involved in community service projects. ORU staff noted that Exhibit E allows for job training and placement services as part of recovery support.

The Committee noted that job training and placement services are critical in providing support to individuals with Opioid Use Disorder and that homeless individuals are a priority population and raised no concerns about the proposed program.

Public Comment

Public comment was opened. No public comments were made.

Adjourn