



Addiction  
Professionals of  
North Carolina

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# Opioid Settlement Funds

**ADVOCACY**  
guide





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# OVERVIEW

After extensive legal proceedings and negotiations, North Carolina's Attorney General, Josh Stein, came to an agreement with three large drug distributors and the drug maker Johnson and Johnson (J&J) on a settlement supported by all 100 North Carolina counties and our largest municipalities. These funds represent a call to accountability with the money being distributed to the communities that have been impacted by the opioid epidemic.

Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) develops from many contributing factors and continues to persist because of a broken, underfunded, and inflexible system and unavailable services. The pandemic has shown a light on these failures and on where we need to focus. In the first year of the pandemic, North Carolina saw a 40% increase in death by drug overdose. Last year, 2021, the overdose rate increased again, though the exact number is still being finalized (NCDHHS). Data for the first part of 2022 does not look promising, either. We can and must do better.

This historic agreement secured over \$750 million for North Carolina to fund treatment, recovery, prevention, and harm reduction. The Settlement funds provide an opportunity for turning the tide and impacting how OUD is prevented, treated, and remediated by broader systems. Lasting impact is going to take more work, collaboration and innovation than has ever been seen.

We must be able to effectively advocate locally and help our county and city leaders know what services are most needed to remediate the harms of Opioid Use Disorders. Ultimately, our goal is to strengthen our communities and complement the wide array of statewide strategies to prevent OUD and support people with OUD through providing treatment and recovery supports.

# North Carolina's Unique Approach

Work funded through the opioid settlement will build on [North Carolina's Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan](#) that focuses on four key priority areas to track, measure, and monitor trends to ensure action is informed by credible evidence.



North Carolina has created and compiled a number of resources for successful implementation and evaluation of strategies, including tracking and visualization of data for each county that presents a clear picture of the work being done and where there are gaps. All the tools are in the Resources section of this guide.

These priority areas include Centering Equity and Lived Experience of historically marginalized people, Prevention through addressing trauma, Harm Reduction by including polysubstance use, and Connection to Care through increased treatment access.

	Reduce Supply	Children & Families	Harm Reduction	Non-Medical Drivers	Justice-Involved Pops	Treatment & Recovery	Equity & Lived Exper.	Track Progress
Metrics	Opioid Pills	Foster care b/c SUD	Comm. Naloxone Reversals	Calls for Housing Assistance	Prison Incarcerated Population	Bupe	Med-Drug Deaths by Race/Ethnicity	Med-Drug Deaths
	% Illicit	Plan of Safe Care	Acute Hep C	% Unemployed	LEA Naloxone Reversals	ODU		Med-Drug ED Visits
Local Actions	Dropbox	START	Naloxone Distrib.	Housing First	Pre-Arrest Diversion	Peer-Support Specialists	PWLE Involved	Point-Person
	Fentanyl Test Strips	DSS CRP	Sterile Syringes	Fair Chance Hiring	MAT in Jails	MAT providers	HMP CBOs	DHHS Resources

One specific resource that outlines actions to take in each priority area and metrics to measure impact.

# Memorandum of Agreement

## Local Focus vs. Statewide Funding

In April 2021, the office of the Attorney General and the Association of County Commissioners released a [Memorandum of Agreement](#) (MOA) between the State and local governments to ensure efficient and effective distribution and use of funds in North Carolina. To maximize funds flowing to North Carolina communities and those providing front line services, the MOA allocates 15 percent of settlement funds to the State and sends the remaining **85 percent to NC's 100 counties and 17 municipalities as the epicenters and headquarters of the local response**. The ultimate goal is to impact local and statewide transformation to ensure our communities have the tools needed to continue to prevent and combat opioid use disorders as they occur.

## MOA Details

The MOA offers localities two options to allocate their funding, **Option A** is a short list of designated “high impact strategies” that communities can adopt based on their specific needs. **Option B** involves a longer list of strategies with a more open-ended path, this allows communities to participate in a collaborative strategic planning process to identify specific goals and develop their own outcome measurements. The hope is that with a wider scope of approaches a variety of different community stakeholders will get involved to shape the local impact.

## APNC's Recommendations

APNC recognizes that adequately addressing the negative impacts of the opioid and overdose crises will require a number of strategies, programs, activities, and perspectives.

Prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery all impact different parts of the system and address issues in communities in a number of distinct ways. For this reason, **APNC recommends that opioid settlement funds be distributed to well-established direct service providers with proven records of success. Additionally, funding should be considered for new and innovative initiatives created and operated by or with guidance from field experts.** Now is the time to invest in actionable solutions at the local level to maximize impact for communities across our state. We suggest that counties create oversight committees that include SUD experts to assist in determining the best use of funds, especially as the field continues to change over the next 18 years.

For additional information about the MOA, visit the MOA Resource Center at:

<https://www.morepowerfulnc.org/opioid-settlements/nc-memorandum-of-agreement/>

# Memorandum of Agreement



## Option A

- Collaborative strategic planning
- Evidence-based Addiction Treatment
- Recovery support services
- Recovery housing support
- Employment-related services
- Early Intervention
- Naloxone Distribution
- Post-overdose response teams
- Syringe service programs
- Criminal justice diversion programs
- Addiction treatment for incarcerated people
- Reentry programs for incarcerated people

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## Option B

Option B involves a wider range of strategies with a more open-ended path, this allows communities to use a collaborative strategic planning process to identify specific goals and develop their own outcome measurements. The hope is that with a wider scope of approaches a variety of different community stakeholders will get involved to shape the core objectives. It is crucial to have someone with expertise in mental health/substance use disorder (SUD) overseeing coordination of Option B strategies.

# General Advocacy Tips

Opioid settlement funds are being distributed to communities and municipalities rather than the state so that individual communities can make decisions about how those funds can best improve the lives of their citizens. No one knows your community better than you do, so **now is your chance to speak up and make requests as to where the settlement money should be invested.**

## Know Your Decision Makers

County Commissioners are elected into office, but they are people with their own stories and personal perspectives. Knowing who they are will help you in your advocacy efforts.

### Helpful Information to Know:

- Personal Information
- Length of Time in Office
- Successes/Priorities/Issues of Interests
- Do they care about healthcare/SUD?
- Personal/family history of mental health or SUD?

## Know What Motivates Decision Makers

- Data that shows the current impact of the opioid crisis on your community
  - Data is your proof that there is a problem. It is also where you can see progress over time.
- Meaningful Connections
  - Decision makers are not always subject matter experts. They may not understand the connection between affordable housing and recovery or foster care and substance use disorder, etc.
- Compelling Personal Stories
  - Stories provide an emotional hook for decision makers to relate to and give you an engaging way to talk about the issue that makes it feel real.
- Clear asks from key constituents
  - Sometimes, it is effective to have hundreds of people contacting elected officials about an issue. With the opioid settlement funds, a better case will be made if communities unite and present a clear ask or suggested strategy/ spending plan that represents the best interest of multiple stakeholders (organizations, individuals, businesses, etc.).

## Have a Clear Ask

*See Defining Your Ask Below*

- Know up front what you want to accomplish
- Ask for something specific, and ask early in the meeting/letter

## Be a Resource

*Be able to answer questions or know how to get them answers*

- Be sure to follow up after the conversation
- Offer a one-page summary document of your request and relevant data that they can reference



# Defining Your Ask

## 1

### Utilize Statistics

Data is the real-life proof that there is a problem impacting your community. You may already know what issues your community is facing, but you need data that shows it. Conversely, looking at data may reveal an issue in your community. Either way, data is the starting point.

Here are a few sources to pull from:

- [Data by County \(Click Metrics\)](#)
- [Compare County Data \(Click Action Grid\)](#)
- [Compare NC to Federal Data](#)
- [APNC Workforce Report](#)
- [APNC Community Voices Report](#)

**Use data to answer these questions:**

- What is needed in your community?
- Where are you lacking resources?

## 3

### Assess Current Work

Chances are, there are already incredible people doing work in your community. Take advantage of any pre-existing local networks to identify themes, needs, strengths, and limitations. Gathering a consensus with peers and community partners will strengthen your advocacy as you reach out to local officials.

**Consider:**

- Who is already doing this work?
- What is going well?
- What gaps exist in current service offerings?

## 2

### Identify Stakeholders

Community leaders have watched the opioid epidemic unfold from different perspectives. This settlement brings the opportunity to pull these voices together to create a successful plan to utilize these funds. To do this effectively, you have to know who is involved in this work from a variety of different angles in your area. Often there is a single county board or city council member who is the expert on behavioral health or social services issues. Figure out who that is and talk to that person specifically about the county strategy and community needs. Many counties/ municipalities have designated point persons for the opioid settlement funds. Find out if you have one [HERE](#) by clicking "Actions." If you don't, get involved and encourage your peers!

**Consider:**

- Who is making decisions?
- Who can influence these decisions?
- What perspectives are missing?



## 4

### Share Your Story

We connect with others through story. Stories are how we see each other in new ways and learn to practice empathy. Data, charts, and white papers are valuable resources, but heart and passion are the driving force behind tangible change. Take some time to explain why this work matters to you.

**Consider:**

- Why does this work matter to you?
- How will this work change your community?
- Get Personal.

# Writing Your Advocacy Script

This script can be used in whole or in part to help you as you plan to meet with your local leaders. Our goal is to make this as easy as possible for YOU!

## 01

### Introduce Yourself

**Examples:**

My name is **[your name]**, and I represent **[organization name]**. I'm here to ask you to allocate incoming opioid settlement money to **[fill in the blank]**.

My name is **[your name]**. I'm here to ask you to allocate incoming opioid settlement money to **[fill in the blank]**.

### Introduce The Issue

Choose whether you'd like to incorporate a local, state, or national data point. If you don't know where you start, choose from the list below; however, [NCDHHS's Opioid & Substance Use Action Plan Dashboard](#) has great data on the intersection of the social determinants of health and substance use.

## 02

National	State	Local
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2021, our nation saw 108,000 overdose deaths in one year.</li> <li>In America, one person dies from an overdose every five minutes</li> <li>Fentanyl is the leading cause of death for adults aged 18-45 in the United States.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 90% of overdose deaths in North Carolina are unintentional.</li> <li>67% of North Carolina's workforce reported an increase in barriers to services for their clients due to the pandemic.</li> <li>68% of North Carolina's workforce reported an increase in demand for their services due to the pandemic.</li> <li>85% of the frontline behavioral health workforce is currently experiencing at least one symptom of burnout.</li> <li>Close to 2500 overdoses were reversed in 2021.</li> <li>For each overdose death in North Carolina, there are 5 emergency department visits for overdoses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In a recent survey conducted by Addiction Professionals of North Carolina, the _____ area noted their primary need was _____.</li> <li>Find local data <a href="#">HERE</a> by clicking on METRICS to fill in the blanks below.</li> <li>[COUNTY] reported [Number] overdose reversals in 2021.</li> <li>[COUNTY] lost [NUMBER] of citizens to overdose in 2021.</li> </ul>

# 03

## Tell Your Story

*Bring your chosen statistic to life. Share a piece of your story and why this work matters to you. This can be professional or personal. Specific examples work best.*

### *Examples of 1-2 sentence stories*

In my job as an outreach worker, I have lost count of how many times I've needed Narcan to reverse an overdose. It's a miracle to see people come back to life and get a second chance.

I've had to turn away clients who desperately need help because I don't have enough staff to treat them, and my current staff is already working with high caseloads.

My best friend died of an overdose when she was 25 years old. Her death was completely preventable.

I found recovery over 10 years ago thanks to the help of some incredible people who knew about the right community resources.

## Make a Suggestion Statement

*What will meet the need in your community? What are the capabilities of your area to provide service? Where do you want the opioid settlement money to go?*

*Fill in the blanks:*

[COUNTY/CITY] needs to invest in [strategy/program/service].

# 04

# 05

## Close With an Impact Statement

### *Examples:*

Preventing overdose deaths means people stay alive long enough to get the help they need and deserve.

Increasing access to treatment means more people can find and maintain long term recovery.

Investing in recovery services means people can get the support they need to continue their recovery journeys.



## Tie It All Together

After you go through steps 1-5, you should have a script that looks something like this:

**Example:**

My name is Morgan, and I represent Addiction Professionals of North Carolina. I'm here to talk with you about the incoming opioid settlement money. In 2021, almost 2,500 overdoses were reversed. My best friend died of an overdose when she was 25 years old. Her death was completely preventable. Wake County needs to invest in overdose prevention strategies like providing Narcan to people who use drugs. Preventing overdose deaths means people stay alive long enough to get the help they need and deserve.



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**Fill out your advocacy script here.**

**STEP 01:**  
Introduction

**STEP 02:**  
Data

**STEP 03:**  
Story

**STEP 04:**  
Suggestion

**STEP 05:**  
Impact

# 07

## Optional Advocacy Requests

*Beyond the use of the actual funds, you may want to include additional requests in your advocacy efforts.*

### **Decision makers in your county/city consulting with experts as they make their decisions.**

**Example:**

Additionally, as you consider requests and make decisions about the future of our county, I hope you will partner with community leaders and field experts who are familiar with the opioid and overdose crisis. It is crucial that we work together to ensure the opioid settlement funds make the maximum possible impact on our community.

### **Workforce Support**

**Example:**

The behavioral health workforce is currently understaffed and overwhelmed. The implementation of any new programs adds additional burdens to an already stretched workforce with limited capacity. Our county must include a workforce strategy as part of our use of settlement funds to ensure adequate staffing to address the growing behavioral health needs across the state.

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## Follow Up

*Don't let this meeting/interaction be the only time you speak to your elected official/decision makers.*

**Example:**

Write a short note thanking them for taking time to meet with you. Include any follow up data, information, or connections you promised . Offer to be a resource/connect them to resources in the future.

# 08

# Your Full Advocacy Script

*Use the space below to complete your full advocacy script. You can read directly from it for a phone call, send it as a letter, or use it as notes when you meet with decision makers in person!*

# Resources

Throughout this guide, we've mentioned a variety of resources. For your convenience, we've gathered them all here on one page as well as throughout the guide where they are mentioned. We encourage you to utilize these throughout the advocacy process and beyond.

## **More Powerful NC**

<https://www.morepowerfulnc.org/get-involved/community-involvement>

- Offers a set of community toolkits tailored to different audiences
- Defines prevention basics
- Digital and Print Poster resource
- Drug “take back” cards to remind people to safely dispose of medications-
- Examples of Community based strategies, including engaging schools and businesses in the advocacy effort, working with first responders and emergency departments, working with law enforcement and the court system

## **Timeline for Payments**

<https://ncopioidsettlement.org/data-dashboards/payment-schedule/>

- Payment timeline through 2038
- Technical notes and payment details

## **Data Dashboard**

<https://www.ncopioidsettlement.org/data-dashboards>

Data by County in the following areas:

- Opioid Indicators
- Community Drivers of Health

## **Statewide Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan Data Dashboard**

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/opioid-and-substance-use-action-plan-data-dashboard>

Everything you need to know about the OSUAP in one place.

- Compare county progress side by side (click Action Grid)
- Data around social determinants of health (click Metrics)
- Find your county point person (click Actions)

## **Opioid Settlement Tracker**

<https://www.opioidsettlementtracker.com>

A central source for national information on opioid settlements across the nation and how each state is spending their funds.

## **Memorandum of Agreement**

<https://www.morepowerfulnc.org/opioid-settlements/nc-memorandum-of-agreement/>

This guide is just the beginning. Opioid Settlement Funds will be distributed over 18 years, and a second settlement was recently reached. Your advocacy work will be needed when those funds are distributed as well.

*We hope this guide helps you find ways to get involved in your community and take meaningful action to address the opioid and overdose epidemic in our state.*

*As you work through this guide and begin meeting with your local decision makers, please let APNC know how we can support your efforts. We are here to help!*

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