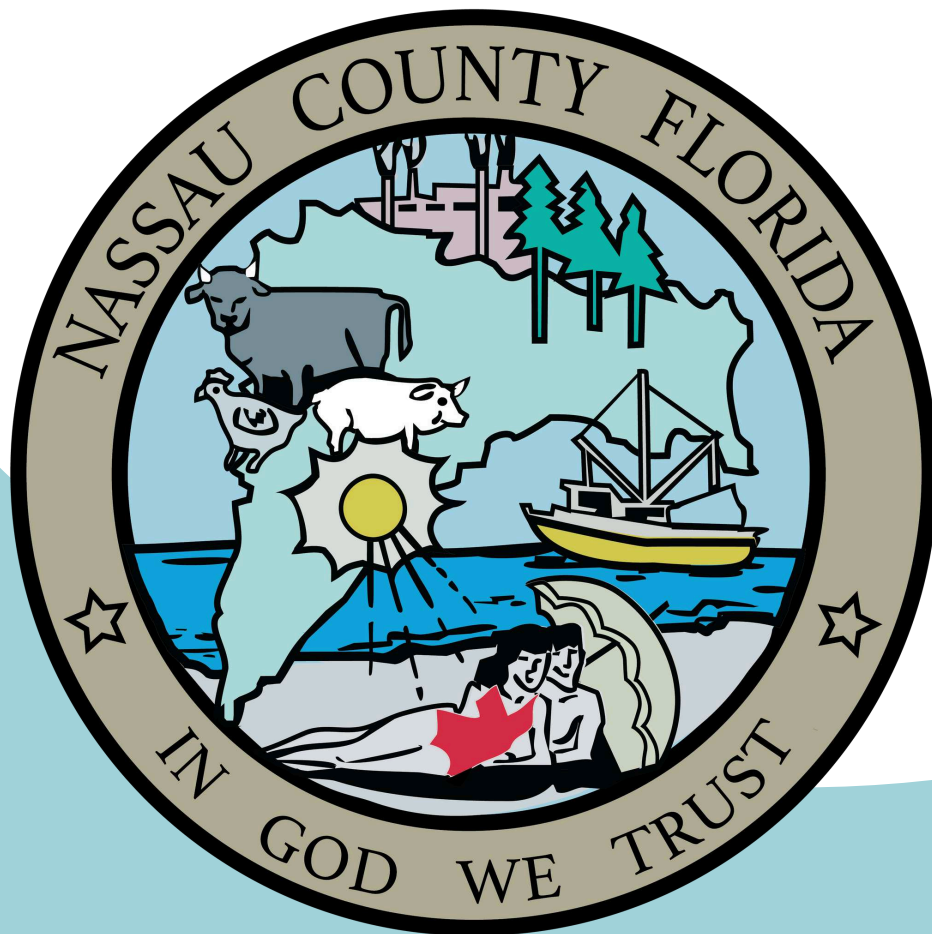


NASSAU COUNTY

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

SWOT ANALYSIS REPORT



Prepared By:
**Northeast Florida
Regional Council**

Executive Summary

Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 105,227 individuals died due to drug overdoses from December 2022 to December 2023, with 75% (79,374) of these deaths reported as "opioid involved."

In anticipation of accessing opioid abatement settlements, the Nassau County Board of County Commissioners sought the assistance of the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) to conduct a community-based Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. This analysis aimed to evaluate the county's actions in combating the rise of substance use and mental health disorders. The SWOT Workshop, conducted on February 20, 2024, facilitated by NEFRC staff, provided community partners with relevant data on substance use disorder (SUD) impacts and guided discussions around three key focus areas: Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Support.

During the meeting, partners identified effective programs, additional needed initiatives, and short-term and long-term priorities for prevention, treatment, and recovery support. Key highlights from the meeting include:

1. Community Paramedicine Program (CPP):

- To address the need for real-time data and improve intervention efforts, Nassau County should explore implementing a CPP through the Fire and Rescue Department. This program would involve specialized paramedics responding to overdose calls, collecting critical data, and connecting patients to treatment services. Peer support specialists would provide follow-up and support for affected individuals.

2. Jail-Bridge Program:

- The Nassau County Sheriff's Office reports that 64% of inmates have an SUD, emphasizing the need for expanded treatment programs within correctional facilities. The Jail-Bridge Program connects recently released individuals with service providers to facilitate their community reintegration. However, resource constraints limit long-term follow-ups.

3. Strategic Planning for Opioid Settlement Funds:

- With 18 years of opioid settlement funds available, Nassau County needs a robust process for deploying these funds effectively. Implementing a structured process will allow accurate assessment of program needs, development of prioritized project lists, and transparent fund utilization, enabling the county to expand essential services and seize additional funding opportunities.

As a result of the meeting, Nassau County leadership has been proactive in implementing these opioid-related funds and will work to establish a community task force. This task force will prioritize future projects, allowing funds to be distributed effectively across the three primary focus areas of SUDs and throughout the county.

The Impact of Substance Use Disorder

Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 105,227 individuals died due to a drug overdose from December 2022-December 2023, 75% of these (79,374) of these are reported as “opioid involved.” However, due to reporting delays, the actual numbers could be higher. Other overdose related deaths were due to methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin and psychostimulants.

Local provisional data from FLHealthCHARTS indicates that Nassau County suffered 21 fatal overdoses with 14 of being the result of opioids.

Overdoses, Nassau County							
Indicator	Measure	Year	January-March (Provisional)	April-June (Provisional)	July-September (Provisional)	October-December (Provisional)	Year-to-Date (Provisional)
Fatal Overdoses							
Opioid Overdose Deaths	Count	2022	3	0	8	3	14
Drug Overdose Deaths	Count	2022	3	0	11	7	21

Figure 1: Provisional Overdose Data (FLHealthCHARTS.gov)

Since 2018, the Agency for Health Care Administration has tracked the total non-fatal Overdose Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations based on used substances. These ED visits and Hospitalizations often have a fiscal burden on the local community.

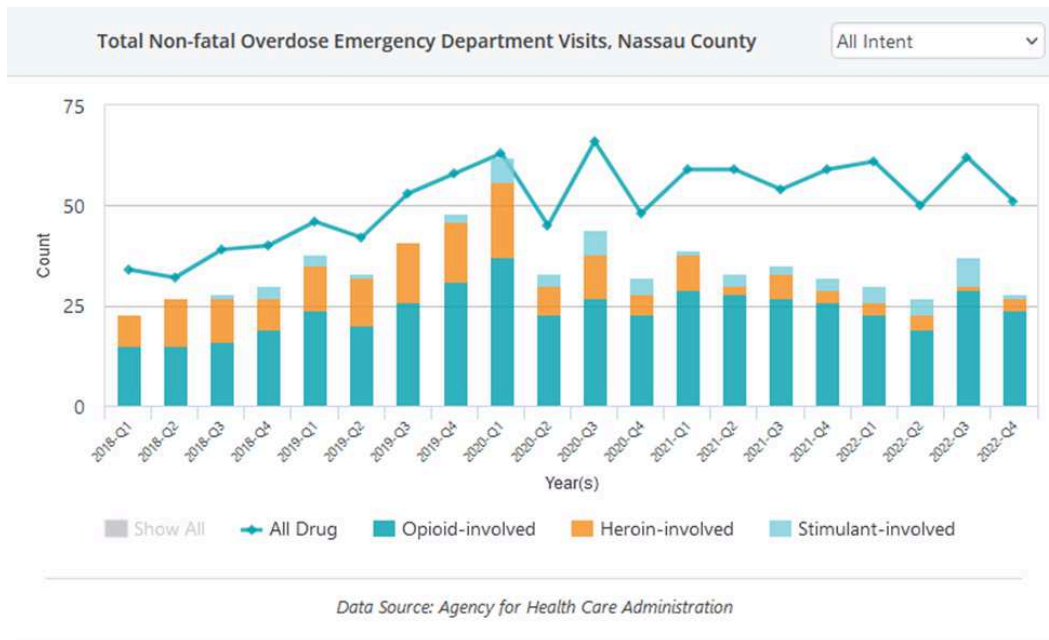


Figure 2: Total Non-fatal Overdose ED Visits (FLHealthCHARTS.gov)

The Impact of Substance Use Disorder

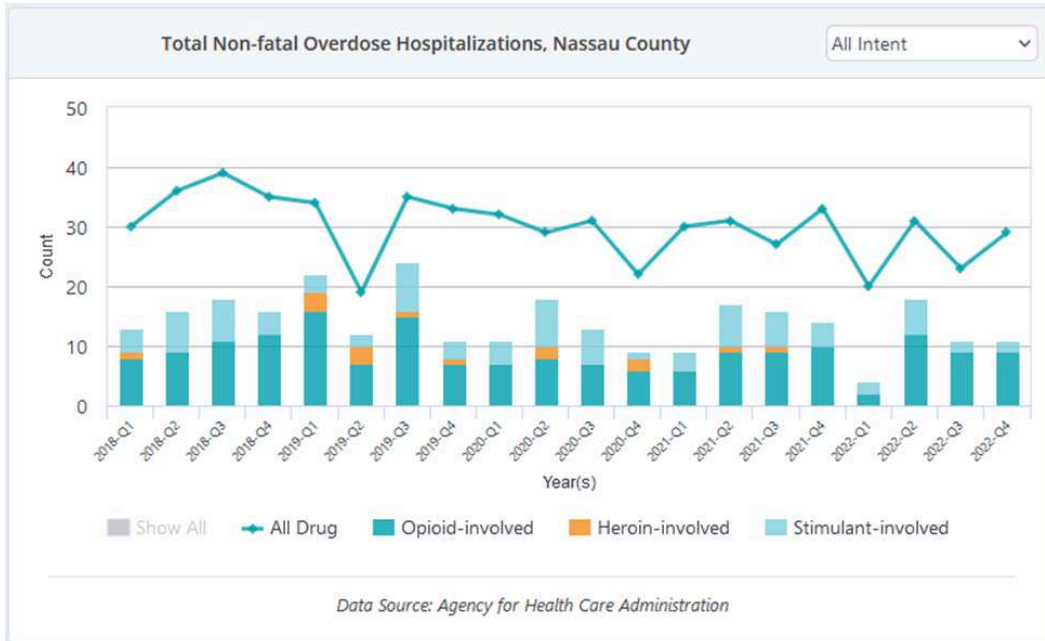


Figure 3: Total Non-fatal Hospitalizations (FLHealthCHARTS.gov)

SWOT: Prevention

Prevention activities work to educate and support individuals and communities to prevent the use and misuse of drugs and the development of substance use disorders.

The following comments were received during the community SWOT analysis meeting. These comments are not ranked in priority.

Strengths

- Starting Point Behavioral Health has programs targeting elementary and middle schoolers
- Co-responders program to combine mental and behavioral health experts with first responders
- DOH's Healthy Start and OD2A programs
- DOH's Community Health Assessment
- Medical Reserve Corps & Starting Point's utilization of volunteers
- Expansion of new peer support services through Rebel Recovery
- Distribution of Naloxone and safe disposal kits
- RAD (Resilience Against Drug) program

Weaknesses

- Access to real-time data
- Concentrated effort on expanding volunteer utilization and certification assistance
- Community prevention organization should target expansion to medical, first responder, pharmacy and education personnel
- Expand education to the public
- Expand social media campaigns

Opportunities

- Set up data coordination with North Florida HIDTA staff
- Starting point is exploring opportunities to aid in staff recruitment and resource acquisition
- Increase public education on proper medication disposal
- Expand partnerships with Nassau County Medical Society, faith-based organizations, community health workers, local chamber of commerce and businesses
- Create a systematic process and resource list for SUD & Mental Health resources
- Encourage and promote community engagement
- Expand care coordination
- Staff specialist in local Emergency Departments for inductions

Threats

- Stigma
- Reduction in funding i.e. OD2A
- Difficulties in the hiring of certified peer support specialist
- Rising cost
- Individuals returning to communities where SUD started

SWOT: Treatment

Treatment for substance use disorders is designed to help people stop alcohol or drug use and transition into recovery to remain sober and/or drug-free.

The following comments were received during the community SWOT analysis meeting. These comments are not ranked in priority.

Strengths

- Jail Bridge Program
- Starting Point has Medicated Assisted Treatment options
- Mobile unit to assist in psychiatric resources
- Social support groups
- FDOH Community Health Assessment to aid in identifying needs and resources

Weaknesses

- Expand public information on local treatment options and community support groups
- Expand SUD and Mental Health staff training and treatment services in the jail.
- Develop social media campaigns for treatment options
- Expand Telehealth options

Opportunities

- Starting Point will be expanding its MAT locations and acquiring mobile MAT capabilities
- Extend and expand capabilities to increase assistance and follow up with individuals released from jail
- The county is reliant on surrounding counties for detox and inpatient services
- Expansion of transportation, food and housing assistance
- No Florida Association of Recovery Residence certified houses.

Threats

- Stigma
- Lack of medical insurance amongst vulnerable population
- Employee recruitment
- Inconsistent and unpredictable funding sources
- Funding restrictions

SWOT: Recovery Support

Recovery Support services assist individuals in their recovery and prevention of relapse in the future. Recovery is a lifelong process, and staying in recovery can be a difficult task.

The following comments were received during the community SWOT analysis meeting. These comments are not ranked in priority.

Strengths

- **Medication - Assisted Recovery Anonymous provides virtual meetings**
- **Community services offered by the YMCA**
- **NEFLAA.org**
- **AWARE recovery group**
- **Nassau County residents have access to veteran's support organizations**

Weaknesses

- **Expansion of warm-handoffs between licensed care to community care**
- **Promote the expansion of community-based Narcotics Anonymous**
- **Expand telehealth services**
- **Develop an organization/service resource hub**
- **Expand prevention efforts to those in recovery**

Opportunities

- **No Florida Association of Recovery Residence certified houses**
- **Recovery Support groups need to be expanded**
- **Increase partnerships with faith-based organizations**
- **Expansion of housing, utility and transportation assistance**
- **Expand virtual community support groups**
- **Increase education and assistance for families of those in recovery**

Threats

- **Stigma**
- **External stressors i.e, housing**
- **Staffing shortages**
- **Rising cost**
- **Inconsistent and unpredictable funding sources**
- **Funding restrictions**

Analysis

Prevention

Provisional data from the CDC indicates that 40 individuals in Nassau County experienced a fatal overdose between June 2022 and June 2023. In addition to these deaths, Nassau County and its community partners are also fiscally impacted by Substance Use Disorders, while it's impossible to know precisely how much the county and its partners are affected. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates the average return on investment of prevention services to be 18 dollars for every dollar spent.

Fiscal impacts from substance use disorders (SUD) present themselves in services provided by Fire and Rescue departments, Law Enforcement agencies, and medical providers, all of which end up reflected in county and municipal budgets. To address prevention, entities supporting Nassau County have taken various approaches. One strength is that Starting Point Behavioral Healthcare provides a support line for students and their families that is available Monday-Friday. They also offer substance awareness and mental health programs for 5th and 6th-grade students (transitioning from elementary to middle school). While all school programs should be expanded, services for 8th and 9th graders should be prioritized. Expanding these programs for 8th and 9th graders in the transition from middle to high school provides adolescents with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to make healthy choices and resist peer pressure to engage in substance use.

Another strength in Nassau County is the substance use disorder (SUD) and mental health Community Partners group. This group, facilitated by the Community Coalition Alliance, convenes monthly to enable knowledge sharing and identify areas for improvement in the community's response to SUD and mental health challenges. A key challenge these partners face is access to real-time data, which is crucial for effective intervention and resource allocation. State and Federal data on SUD often lags due to official testing processes. To overcome this obstacle, Nassau County should explore implementing a Community Paramedicine Program (CPP) through its Fire and Rescue Department.

Analysis

Prevention Cont.

This program, proven effective in other counties, would enable specialized paramedics to respond to overdose calls, collect vital data, and facilitate connections to treatment services. Additionally, the inclusion of peer support specialists in the program offers valuable follow-up support for individuals affected by overdose incidents.

Furthermore, during the SWOT meeting, the North Florida High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program offered assistance by providing real-time data on SUD impacts across the region. HIDTA, established by Congress, monitors and shares critical data that could benefit Nassau County and its community organizations in their efforts to combat substance abuse. By investing in evidence-based prevention programs, leveraging real-time data, and prioritizing access to treatment and recovery support services, Nassau County and its partners can significantly reduce SUDs.

During the SWOT meeting, community partners identified a few areas for improvement that the county and its partners should address—first, finding better ways to integrate volunteers into prevention work. Nassau County and its partners have access to a robust medical reserve Corp, but they are underutilized due to training and knowledge of how they can help. The second improvement to be made is a concentrated effort to educate medical professionals in the community on safe opioid prescribing practices, including medical doctors, dentists, and other prescribing professionals. Lastly, there needs to be more involvement and outreach to faith-based organizations. These organizations can profoundly assist community members with physical resources and emotional support.

Treatment

The Florida Department of Health in Nassau County is updating its Community Health Assessment, a vital tool to assist community organizations in providing treatment services. This assessment enables residents to offer insights into service accessibility and areas needing improvement through questions related to Population Characteristics, Housing Conditions, and Health Behaviors. Armed with data from the assessment, substance use disorder (SUD) treatment providers can effectively allocate resources to areas of greatest need.

One significant asset of the county's treatment services is the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) provided by Starting Point Behavioral Healthcare. MAT offers tailored treatment plans for individuals utilizing medication to alleviate withdrawal symptoms. However, access to MAT services can vary based on individual needs and prescribed medication, emphasizing the importance of consistent availability. To broaden its reach, Starting Point aims to establish additional MAT locations across the county and introduce a mobile unit, aiming to make this service more accessible and to reduce the stigma associated with treatment. However, expansion efforts encounter challenges, including difficulties in recruiting certified staff.

Data from the Nassau County Sheriff's Office reveals that 64% of inmates in the county jail struggle with an SUD. This underscores the importance of expanding treatment programs within correctional facilities, such as MAT, counseling, and inmate-led support groups. Additionally, the sheriff's office coordinates a Jail-Bridge Program, with a dedicated staff member connecting recently released individuals with service providers to ease their transition into the community. However, resource constraints and staffing limit the program's ability to conduct long-term follow-ups.

Financial constraints present significant hurdles to treatment programs and recovery support services. These services often require substantial funding and an extended duration of support. As a result, funding opportunities must be more consistent and less restrictive; short-term funding impedes long-term planning and hinders expansion efforts. Other significant challenges impacting Nassau County when it comes to treatment services include the county's diversity; due to its size and population distribution, the east side of the county currently receives a majority of the services offered.

Treatment Cont.

As a result, more data is needed to identify what services are required on the county's westside. Additionally, another major challenge for the county and its partners is the recruitment and retention of treatment specialists; while there are several limiting factors for these staff, such as licensing and availability, staff pay is the most significant. Due to the demand for these qualified personnel, the county and its partners should find ways to provide additional salary and or signing bonuses to recruit and retain these staff.

Recovery Support

The National Institute on Drug Abuse characterizes recovery as a dynamic process where individuals enhance their health and well-being, pursue self-directed lives, and strive to fulfill their potential. Overcoming severe substance use disorders (SUD) and reclaiming health and social functioning is possible with appropriate support. However, the challenge for local governments and community organizations lies in addressing the diverse and individualized needs of those in recovery.

Individuals in recovery have varied needs and may include access to various support services, from community-based support groups to employment assistance and mental health resources. These needs can also encompass more complex requirements, such as transportation assistance, housing support, and access to certified peer support specialists. Moreover, recovery may necessitate long-term engagement in supportive programs. Unfortunately, funding for recovery support programs often comes in short-term grants or restrictions on capital investments, making long-term initiatives hard to plan for and support.

Fortunately, Nassau County and its partners have several strengths in providing recovery support services to its residents. Several organizations have recovery support groups. One highlight from the SWOT meeting was Medication-Assisted Recovery Anonymous (MARA), which has virtual support groups. With 92% of residents in Nassau County having access to broadband services, the use of virtual support groups not only allows for residents across the county to have access to support services, but they can also do so in a way that prevents stigma from being a reason they don't want to use services. Another strength identified during the meeting was veteran support services. However, these programs are severely limited by the number of needed staff and resources. These programs need to be cataloged and expanded as much as possible.

Recovery Support Cont.

Expanding recovery support services in Nassau County requires strategic planning to identify the necessary services and their optimal locations for maximum impact. One crucial initiative involves establishing a comprehensive resource center tailored to individuals with substance use disorders and mental health needs. Furthermore, strengthening partnerships with faith-based organizations, Nassau County Medical Society, the YMCA, local businesses, and the Chamber of Commerce will enhance the Community Health Assessment, service provision, and resource coordination across the county.

Additionally, community partners should prioritize expanding educational resources for the families and friends of individuals in recovery. This could involve disseminating informational materials, launching targeted social media campaigns, and establishing supportive social groups. By equipping families and friends with a deeper understanding of substance use disorders and providing them with tools to support their loved ones, Nassau County and its partners can play a pivotal role in reducing stigma and fostering a supportive environment for recovery.

Additional Comments

In addition to the area-specific recommendations, Nassau County benefits from several services that support efforts to combat substance use disorder (SUD) across the entire spectrum. For instance, the Medical Reserve Corps facilitates a volunteer network, which may not be suitable for roles requiring detailed background checks and certifications, but plays a crucial role in community outreach events and training organized by county partners. To enhance the capabilities of volunteers, the Medical Reserve Corps acknowledges the need for more comprehensive training and support in volunteer management. One resource for agencies seeking assistance with volunteer management is provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Given the critical demand for volunteers in post-disaster situations, the agency and its partners have established a wide array of training programs designed to support the recruitment and utilization of volunteers in various capacities. These training opportunities, frequently provided at no cost and accessible virtually, are tailored to equip volunteer managers with the necessary skills and knowledge to utilize volunteers effectively.

Additionally, Nassau County residents have access to naloxone and safe medication disposal resources through partner organizations. However, there needs to be more awareness and training regarding the availability and usage of these resources. To address this gap, focused social media campaigns are crucial in educating the community on naloxone administration and safe medication disposal practices. Notably, Nassau County partners also contribute to reducing the availability of unused medications through participation in DEA Drug Take-Back Days, effectively collecting and disposing of 93.5 pounds of medication across four locations during the fall collection day in November 2023.

Lastly, given the extended accessibility to Nassau County Opioid Settlement funds (18 years in total), the evolving needs of the county and its residents in addressing opioid and substance overdoses necessitate ongoing adaptation. A robust process for deploying these funds is crucial to maximize their impact. By implementing a structured process, Nassau County can accurately assess the need for programs or services, develop a prioritized project list, and ensure transparent utilization of funds. Having a vetted list of projects enables Nassau County to scale up and expand essential services, positioning the county to seize funding opportunities beyond the scope of opioid-specific settlements.

Additional Comments

In conclusion, the fight against substance use disorder (SUD) in Nassau County demands a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. From prevention efforts in schools and communities to intervention strategies leveraging real-time data and partnerships, and finally, to robust treatment and recovery support services, Nassau County and its partners are actively addressing the challenges SUD poses. By investing in evidence-based prevention programs, leveraging real-time data for targeted interventions, and prioritizing access to treatment and recovery support services, Nassau County is working towards reducing the impact of SUD on its residents and communities. Furthermore, initiatives such as volunteer networks, social media campaigns for naloxone awareness, and strategic planning for using opioid settlement funds are essential to the county's comprehensive approach. As Nassau County continues to adapt and evolve to combat SUD, it remains committed to supporting individuals, families, and communities affected by this complex public health issue.

