

ST. JOHNS 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 109,770 died due to drug overdose from June 2022 - June 2023, 76% of these overdoses (83,594) were reported as “opioid involved”. However, due to reporting delays, the actual numbers could be higher. Additionally, reported and predicted numbers involving synthetic opioids (fentanyl, excluding methadone), methamphetamine, and cocaine have all increased.

In anticipation of access to the opioid abatement settlements, the St. Johns County (SJC) Board of County Commissioners requested the assistance of the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) to conduct a community-based Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of its actions to combat the rise of substance use and mental health disorders. The SWOT Workshop was conducted on October 25, 2023, NEFRC staff provided community partners with relevant data on substance use disorder (SUD) impacts and facilitated a discussion around the three key focus areas Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Support.

St. Johns County has undertaken a comprehensive approach to address the substance use crisis, with particular focus on prevention. Collaborative efforts have resulted in SJC achieving the lowest drug overdose rate in Northeast Florida. Prevention initiatives, led by the Behavioral Health Consortium and supported by community partnerships, have played a crucial role in reducing substance misuse. Treatment services, including innovative programs like the THINK for Success Program and Medication-Assisted Treatment options, aim to provide accessible care to residents.

Despite successes, challenges such as inconsistent funding for treatment services and stigma surrounding substance use persist. Efforts to expand telehealth options and strengthen recovery support services are underway to address these challenges.

Looking ahead, SJC remains committed to collaborative, innovative approaches in combating substance use disorders and promoting community well-being.

The Impact of Substance Use Disorder

Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 109,770 died due to drug overdose from June 2022 - June 2023, 76% of these overdoses (83,594) were reported as "opioid involved". However, due to reporting delays, the actual numbers could be higher. Additionally, reported and predicted numbers involving synthetic opioids (fentanyl, excluding methadone), methamphetamine, and cocaine have all increased.

Local provisional data from FLHealthCHARTS indicates that St. Johns County suffered 49 fatal overdoses in 2022, 40 of those were opioid related.

Overdoses, St. Johns 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	10	9	11	10	40
Drug Overdose Deaths ⓘ	Count	2022	10	10	13	16	49

Figure 1: Provisional Overdose Data (FLHealthCHARTS.gov)

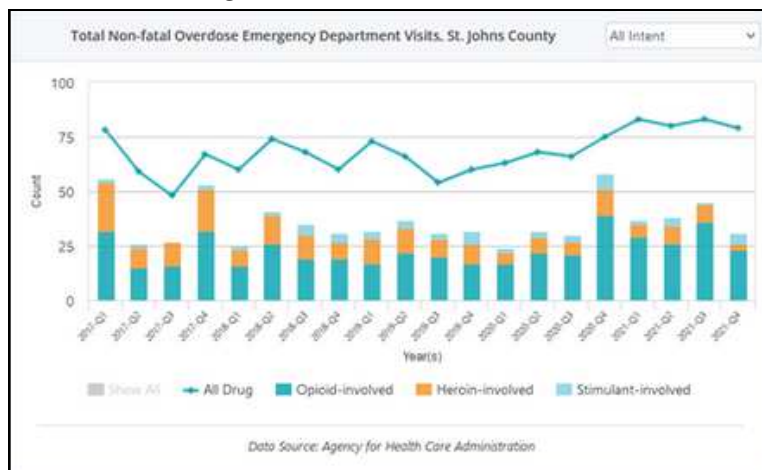


Figure 2: Total Non-fatal Overdose ED Visits (FLHealthCHARTS.gov)

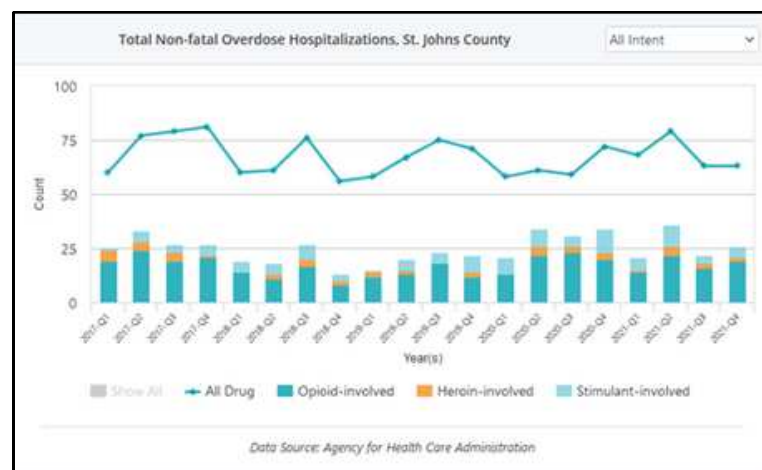


Figure 3: Total Non-fatal Overdose Hospitalizations (FLHealthCHARTS.gov)

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

- **Prevention Coalition**
- **Drug collection Events**
- **Mental Health Services for Youth**
- **Narcan Distribution**
- **Resource officers' ability to issue a juvenile civil citation**
- **Public information/social media campaigns**
- **Outreach events with law enforcement partnerships**
- **Food services and transportation resources**
- **Programs to support frontline workers**

Weaknesses

- **Public Education**
- **More after school activities/programs**
- **Need continued assistance with affordable housing programs**
- **Expand services offered to Baker Acted juveniles**
- **Expanding services to individuals that have experienced Domestic Violence**

Opportunities

- **Expand programs to support frontline workers**
- **Engage family and youth with services (Volusia Model)**
- **Expand summer programs for youth**

Threats

- **Stigma**
- **Impact of Homelife**
- **Available funds have limitations in scope**
- **Fentanyl**
- **Unrealistic expectations due to SJC rankings in education**
- **The rapid evolution in social media**
- **COst of living affecting the difficulty of hiring certified mental health, and substance use professionals.**

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

- **Organizational partnerships (EPIC and SMA)**
- **Foster care services are coordinated through the county. This creates flexibility in programs.**
- **MAT Services**
- **Referrals are offered to other facilities if current locations are at capacity**
- **Availability of Narcan and training**
- **Access to AA groups**
- **BRAVE setting up virtual therapy**

Weaknesses

- **Lacking sufficient residential treatment options**
- **Data pertaining to substance use and mental health are lagging indicators**
- **Expand services to the Hasting area**
- **Use of Marchman Act**
- **Create a receiving facility for Baker Acted juveniles**
- **Childcare with collocated inpatient services**
- **Expansion of local treatment services**

Opportunities

- **Access to higher doses of Naloxone**
- **Expand mobile MAT services**
- **Expand telehealth services**
- **Create harm reduction initiatives**
- **Expansion of Prenatal services**
- **Creation of youth groups focused on behavioral health and substance use**

Threats

- **Stigma**
- **Funding is fragmented and inconsistent**
- **Naloxone usage for substance experimentation**
- **Detox and ER process for connecting individuals with protective services and homeless population**

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

- **Rental and Utility assistance**
- **Conversations specific to Recovery Support services are growing**
- **EPIC reentry programs with SUD and Mental Health focus**
- **Assistance for juveniles exiting the criminal justice system**
- **Drug and Veteran courts**
- **Health and Human Services assistance with food stamp services**

Weaknesses

- **Expansion of Affordable Housing**
- **Expansion of MAT services**
- **Expansion of Alcohol, SUD and mental health support groups**
- **Expand Community Reentry teams**
- **Expand post incarceration services**

Opportunities

- **Recovery Support services need rapid development and expansion**
- **Community education and awareness**
- **Develop a Peer Support cadre through assistance with qualifications**

Threats

- **Stigma**
- **Stressors to reuse**
- **Limitation of funding**
- **Recovery support services are expensive**
- **Budgeting for long term funding of recovery support services**
- **Risk of overdose deaths are significantly increased**
- **Lifetime criminal records limiting peer specialist**

Analysis

Prevention

During the SWOT Analysis meeting, it was apparent that St. Johns County (SJC) and its partners have prioritized prevention efforts. These initiatives have resulted in SJC having the lowest drug overdose rate (per 100,000 persons) in Northeast Florida. They accomplish this through their combined effort of addressing substance use disorders (SUD) and mental health, including the coordination of a Behavioral Health Consortium through the County's Health and Human Services department. Since 2012, the Behavioral Health Consortium—a diverse group of over 30 entities – has worked together to improve existing initiatives and continuously innovate new programs related to mental health. Additionally, the School Board, Flagler Health Care Connect, and THE PLAYERS championship provide youth and their parents with mental health resources and a 24-hour crisis text line through their BRAVE program (Be Resilient and Voice Emotions). The Prevention Coalition of St. Johns County, a non-profit prevention coalition focused on the mission of educating, nurturing, and encouraging residents of St. Johns County to make healthy, informed choices about alcohol and drug use, and its partners regularly discuss prevention-focused initiatives, organize community outreach events, and coordinate the county's participation in the Drug Enforcement Administration's Drug Take Back Day.

St. Johns County and its partners have dedicated themselves to being innovative and collaborative with their initiatives. With the assistance of partners, various SUD social media ads are routinely active to residents. Through a partnership with the Sheriff's Office and the 7th Judicial Circuit, juveniles have access to a Civil Citation program that diverts juveniles charged with minor offenses from the criminal process into treatment and mentoring programs. Lastly, through the Board of County Commissioners, the county allocated \$500,000 from the Fire District Rescue Reserves to provide mental health support for members of SJC Fire Rescue, supporting front-line workers.

Analysis

Prevention Cont.

The importance of furthering prevention efforts cannot be overstated. Not only does it directly affect the number of individuals who could experience an SUD, but prevention is how the county can have the greatest return on its investment. Currently, 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.**

To have the most significant impact on prevention moving forward, the county and its partners should:

1. Increase the advertisements and social media campaigns in place to raise awareness and reduce stigma.
2. Expand after-school and summer programs for youth.
3. Expand mental health resources to front-line workers, including law enforcement, medical personnel, and family/social workers.
4. Address the county's soaring affordable housing issue that limits the recruitment of certified mental health and substance use professionals.

Treatment

Like prevention, St. Johns County (SJC) successfully provides innovative treatment services to its residents through partnerships. EPIC Behavioral HealthCare and the school district offer their THINK for Success Program, a prevention-minded program designed for adolescents experimenting with alcohol and other drugs. This program aims to educate them about the legal, social, and personal implications of their drug-using behavior and choices made at home, school, and in the community. Additionally, access to Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) options are readily available to many SJC residents.

SJC has seen success with its treatment services, including options for detox, inpatient and outpatient programs, and mental health therapy. However, some of these options are still in their early stages and limited in reach, programs need to expand throughout the County to reach more residents. Secondly, as this expansion occurs, the County and its partners should dedicate resources to expanding residential treatment options. Residential treatment/inpatient care continues to be a valuable tool in diversifying treatment options to meet the needs of various patients.

One of the biggest challenges facing SJC is inconsistent funding for treatment services. Funding is often tied to short-term grants or annual funding streams, making sustainable long term planning challenging. When evaluating program development and expansion options, cost becomes a significant limiting factor for providing treatment and recovery support services. Both services require programs that patients may need for long durations and, as a result, are significantly more costly. Expanding telehealth options could be a solution to mitigate these challenges by providing cost-effective alternatives for delivering treatment and recovery support services remotely.

A few ways SJC and its partners can reduce costs but expand their treatment options are to:

1. Increase access to telehealth options.
2. Expand Mobile MAT Services
3. Develop a variety of community support groups focused on behavioral health and substance use.

Recovery Support

As patients enter recovery, their road to sobriety is often filled with obstacles; making recovery support services critical to their success. Services need to be all-encompassing, making them costly. Individual stressors may vary, from the lack of affordable housing and transportation to the absence of community support groups. To address these needs, St Johns County (SJC) has provided various solutions:

- rental and utility assistance programs,
- EPIC Behavioral Healthcare provides re-entry programs focused on SUD and mental health and
- programs to assist residents experiencing food insecurity.

To advance additional initiatives, SJC and its partners aim to expand Medication-Assisted Treatment options (including mobile capabilities), broaden their community re-entry teams, which aid individuals in accessing services post-incarceration, and establish a cadre of Peer Support Specialists by guiding them through a complex and detailed credentialing process.

In addressing the most limiting factors for SJC's recovery support programs, stigma emerges as a primary concern. Stigma can influence the location of services and deter patients from seeking help due to fear of being recognized. To combat this stigma, SJC and its partners could expand social media campaigns and information sharing, explicitly targeting family members or friends of those struggling with SUDs. Additionally, funding inconsistencies significantly challenge recovery services, hindering their sustainability and growth. Recruiting qualified peer specialists is extremely challenging due to background check requirements. While recent state legislation has relaxed some rules, these barriers still exist and complicate the recruitment process.

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Additional Comments

The Behavioral Health Consortium has developed and routinely updates a detailed set of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Care Priorities through their collaborative efforts. This strategy outlines Operational Priorities, Children and Youth Services Priorities, and Adult Services priorities, enabling SJC to take a proactive and diversified approach when seeking funding.

After a review of the top priorities identified across both Children and Youth Services and Adult Services, two key priorities have emerged as focal points moving forward. Under Children and Youth Services, *"Provide training on trauma and how it manifests behaviorally in children, particularly to teachers, pediatricians/doctors, and individuals working with children"* has been identified as crucial. Similarly, within Adult Services, *"Implement a comprehensive community engagement plan to educate, inform, and train individuals that builds awareness of mental health and substance use issues and stigma reduction"* has been identified. These priorities were selected based on their alignment with the top priorities identified in both youth and adult services and the strategic focus on addressing the root causes of substance use and mental health disorders. By prioritizing these initiatives, SJC can secure funding and resources to support their implementation and achieve success in combating SUDs.

Additionally, by convening routine meetings, Consortium partners can discuss real-time data trends and enhance resource connections based on these insights. This data-driven approach enables timely adjustments and effectively allocates resources to address emerging needs. To maximize effectiveness, partners should dedicate time to develop a comprehensive toolkit of social media ads targeting specific topics (such as naloxone administration and mental health resources) and tailored to different populations (including zip codes and age groups). These ads, informed by real-time data, can serve as rapid response tools or informational resources to address identified trends and reach targeted audiences efficiently.

As SJC's Health and Human Services Department prepares for the implementation and continued use of its opioid settlements over the next 18 years, this robust group of stakeholders will significantly assist SJC in practical implementation. Setting goals and routinely evaluating priorities at SJC will be critical factors in their successful process.



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