



epiConnections

A BIMONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMUNICABLE DISEASE AND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION OF BOULDER COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

Celebrating 30 Years of Syringe Access in Boulder County

Nationally, unintentional drug poisoning (overdose) deaths have continued to increase in recent years. In 2017, there were 70,237 overdose deaths in the United States, with the highest rates occurring in West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and Kentucky.¹ In Colorado, there were 1,015 overdose deaths in 2017, an age-adjusted rate of 17.6 per 100,000.²

Fortunately, we have more up-to-date data in Boulder County, and the county is seeing a decrease in overdose deaths. In 2018, there were 29 accidental overdose deaths, a decrease from 39 overdose deaths in 2017. This 26% decrease in overdose deaths is a remarkable shift, especially considering the increases occurring elsewhere in the state and country.

Boulder County Public Health has a long history of supporting people who use drugs to use them safely. [The Works Program](#), a syringe exchange program with sites in Boulder, Longmont, and most recently Lafayette, celebrated 30 years of service in 2019. When it began in 1989, it was one of the first syringe exchange programs in the country, and it was only the second program in the country to be county-funded. The focus has shifted from an HIV epidemic to an overdose epidemic over the past 30 years, but the role of the Works Program remains just as relevant and necessary today.

In 2018, the Works Program served 1,727 unique individuals through 6,767 separate encounters. Works staff provided 386,673 sterile syringes and collected 218,858 used syringes for safe disposal. In addition to providing syringes for safer drug use, Works staff also administer HIV and hepatitis C tests and provide participants with overdose education; naloxone training; and referrals to community resources, such as drug treatment. The program uses a harm reduction model with participants as equal partners in reducing the harms associated with substance use.

Although one year of data may not be indicative of ongoing trends, the decrease in overdose deaths in 2018 is a positive sign that Boulder County is making progress to slow the overdose epidemic. The Works program remains committed to working with all people who use drugs. Individuals can access syringe exchange services through the program at the locations described in the table on page 2.

Local Medical System Using a Person-Centric Approach to Overdose

Across Boulder County, partners from many sectors have been working to improve response to opioid use disorders (OUD) and overdoses by consistently reevaluating approaches to better meet the needs of the population served. This includes implementing a client-centered response to overdose and substance use and treating patients with increased care and respect in all hospital settings in the county. In addition, knowledge about inductions for medication-assisted treatment (MAT) has increased, and some hospitals have begun inducing individuals into treatment within the emergency department, followed by a warm hand-off to providers or MAT clinic settings. These changes are not only lifesaving, they embrace multidisciplinary treatment approaches that lead to increased rates of recovery and decreased repeat overdoses.

The recent Innovation Summit on Opioid Response in the Healthcare Setting that was attended by and included presentations from each of our health systems was a testament to this work. Further, high schools in Boulder have invited speakers to talk to students about personal life experiences with substance use and educate them about OUD, naloxone, and overdose prevention.

Next we'll be looking to involve and educate local businesses in overdose prevention efforts and offer naloxone to be stored on premises and administered in the event of an overdose on businesses' property. Please contact Trina Faatz at tfaatz@bouldercounty.org if you would like to discuss how your business can help reduce stigma and increase overdose prevention and reversal in our communities.

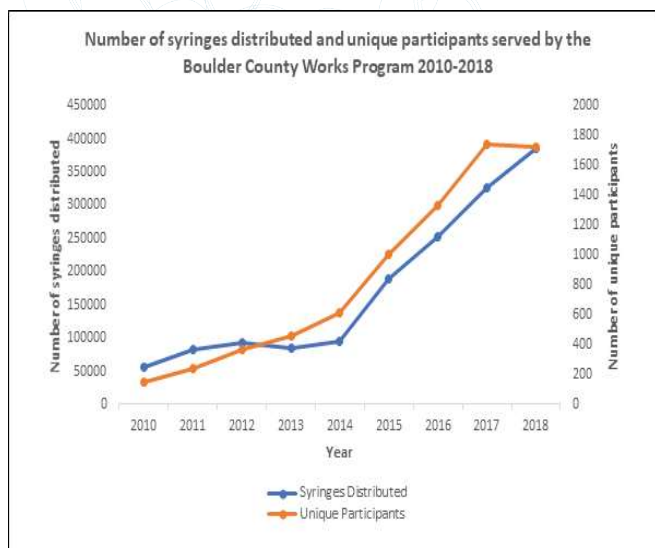
Submitted by Trina Faatz, Boulder County Substance Use Advisory Group Facilitator, Tfaatz@bouldercounty.org and Arielle Gross, Community Opioid Response Specialist, Agross@bouldercounty.org



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Celebrating 30 years, continued from page 1



Addressing meth use is difficult and daunting, as there is no established medication-assisted treatment for meth use like there is for opioid use.

However, the group builds support for those experiencing substance use and opioid use disorder in a variety of ways, such as encouraging mental health and community supports, resource allocation, housing assistance, and alternative therapies. The group also addresses how best to support all types of recovery by increasing awareness about substance use in order to reduce stigma and connect people with harm reduction resources.

Subcommittees address the stages of substance use disorder, beginning with prevention and ending with recovery in the community, examining issues with a multifaceted approach for each sector. They also utilize professionals and community members to present to the group to share their expertise, knowledge, and experience. If you're interested in attending a SUAG meeting, please contact Arielle Gross at agross@bouldercounty.org.

Submitted by Trina Faatz, Boulder County Substance Use Advisory Group Facilitator, Tfaatz@bouldercounty.org and Arielle Gross, Community Opioid Response Specialist, Agross@bouldercounty.org

	Boulder	Longmont	Lafayette	Boulder	Boulder
Agency	Boulder County Public Health	Boulder County Public Health	Boulder County Public Health	Boulder County AIDS Project	Mental Health Partners
Address	3482 Broadway	515 Coffman, Suite 200	1735 South Public Rd. (Clinica Building)	2118 14 th Street	3180 Airport Road
Hours	M-F 10:30am-4:30pm	M-F 10:30am-4:30pm	T/Th 10:30am-4:30pm	M-F 2pm-5pm	24 hours, every day

Submitted by Jackie Blachman-Forshay, Epidemiologist, JBlachman-Forshay@bouldercounty.org

References

¹ Scholl L, Seth P, Kariisa M, Wilson N, Baldwin G. [Drug and Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths – United States, 2013-2017](#). Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. ePub: 21 December 2018.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Drug Overdose Deaths. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>. Updated December 19, 2018. Accessed July 8, 2019.

Local Group Adapts to Changing Landscape of Drug Use

The Substance Use Advisory Group (SUAG) has recently expanded its scope to adapt to the changing substance use landscape in Boulder County, particularly related to the rise in methamphetamine (meth) use. Formerly known as the Opioid Advisory Group, the group now works to address issues related to illicit substance use more broadly than opioids alone.

Establishing an Alternate Care Site During a Global Influenza Pandemic

A global influenza pandemic would have severe impacts on our community and threaten to overwhelm our existing medical infrastructure. Our community would see many more illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths than are seen during seasonal flu outbreaks. In preparation, Boulder County Public Health has partnered with the Boulder County medical community to develop a plan to mitigate impacts of a flu pandemic and provide care to the community.

One integral strategy in this plan is to create a buffer for local emergency departments by providing triage and treatment for lower acuity patients at an alternate care site located at the Boulder County Fairgrounds. To that end, we are conducting a series of exercises together with partners like health care providers, emergency medical services, law enforcement, the Coroner's Office, Office of Emergency Management, and the Medical Reserve Corps of Boulder County to prepare us for a pandemic response. This will culminate in a full-scale exercise in April 2020, when we will test the operations of an alternate care site.

Please look for updates in future *EpiConnections* editions about this important preparedness endeavor. We look forward to the opportunity to help ensure that the Boulder County community is prepared for an influenza pandemic.

Submitted by Chris Campbell, MPA, Emergency Management Planner, Ccampbell@bouldercounty.org