



# The Healing Network

OF WALKER COUNTY

Together, We Heal as One

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **OUR GOAL**

Create a comprehensive Network of prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery resources related to substance use and mental health disorders

### **OUR PARTNERS**

Grow resources connected by  
communication | coordination | collaboration

*Updated September 2022*



## **OBJECTIVE 1: Community education on risks and resources**

Educate Walker County residents and key stakeholders on the risks associated with the use of drugs and alcohol and associated mental health disorders, as well as effective prevention, treatment, and recovery options.

- Strategy 1:** Enhance existing, evidence-based education for youth and adults in Walker County regarding the risks of prescription drug misuse, related mental health issues, and safe disposal of medications.
- Recognizing that Walker County's opioid epidemic has evolved to include many other illicit and legal substances like heroin, methamphetamine, and benzodiazepines, educational programs targeting the county's youth need to cover the risks and resources associated with this expanded group of drugs.
- Strategy 2:** Conduct outreach to school-based programs, summer camps, and churches to educate these groups on ways to engage/support students, friends and family who may be facing drug, alcohol, or mental health issues and may need access to local resources and treatment services.
- Strategy 3:** Train and employ more peer advocates in the field of mental health and substance use as part of both the education and treatment process, prioritizing representation of the following identities: African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, male, youth.
- Strategy 4:** Public awareness initiatives need to be undertaken (or continued) to familiarize a wide range of demographic groups in the county of the following objectives:
- Encouraging residents to be aware of early signs that a family member or friend may be using opioids, other drugs, or alcohol.
  - Promoting awareness of the county's treatment facilities for drug, alcohol, and mental health disorders.
  - Publicizing partners' Helpline numbers.
  - Mitigating the stigma that residents often associate with those experiencing drug, alcohol, and mental health disorders.
  - Emphasizing that drug, alcohol, and mental health disorders are not just confined to certain areas of Walker County.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: Prevention and intervention by health professionals**

Engage health professionals and organizations in the prevention and intervention of substance use disorders among residents of the county.

- Strategy 1:** Provide education to patients receiving opioid medications regarding the risk of addiction, misuse, and diversion.
- Strategy 2:** Promote the use of provider-pharmacist collaborative proactive agreements to provide appropriate pain management to patients with chronic pain, those with disabilities, and palliative care patients.
- Strategy 3:** Ensure all licensed providers in Walker County permitted to prescribe/dispense controlled substances actively engage with the Alabama Department of Public Health Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) and its goals.
- Strategy 4:** Educate health professionals about stigma and how it may impact the care they provide.
- Strategy 5:** Continue expanding the use of the evidence-based practice, Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and similar models, in medical, public health, social services, and education settings.
- Strategy 6:** Integrate relevant behavioral health professionals into medical, public health, social services, and education settings.
- Strategy 7:** Expand and enhance criminal justice deflection and diversion programs that integrate relevant behavioral health professionals into law enforcement agencies and the court system.

## **OBJECTIVE 3: Equitable and timely treatment options**

Ensure equitable and timely access to quality and affordable treatment and recovery support services for residents seeking help with drug, alcohol, and mental health disorders.

- Strategy 1:** Ensure agencies that provide intake, assessment, and/or recovery support services are coordinating among all providers to connect individuals to the appropriate care.
- Strategy 2:** Recruit more not-for-profit treatment and recovery providers that strengthen a continuum of care for Walker County to help those without insurance/those who cannot afford to pay for treatment. Specifically, providers who work in the following areas:
- Detoxification programs.
  - Residential treatment facilities.
  - Bridge medication assisted treatment (MAT) prescription program for individuals discharged from the emergency room and/or are on a wait list for a treatment program.
  - Transitional housing for people as a part of treatment and recovery for substance use and mental health issues.
- Strategy 3:** Identify methods and models to increase the chances that clients will stay engaged with their treatment plan.
- Strategy 4:** Support sustainability of public transit system, including promoting awareness that it is available at a low cost for virtually any citizen in need of transportation to receive treatment services for substance use and mental health disorders.
- Strategy 5:** Have a plan to conduct periodic reviews of the county's integrated system of treatment and recovery support services, focusing on the system's strengths and potential weaknesses. Priority areas include the following:
- Treatment and recovery needs of several population subgroups that were prevalent in focus group research: women, veterans, teens, seniors, those with mental health issues (co-occurring disorders), LGBTQIA+ population, African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx.
  - Certified Recovery Support Specialist (CRSS) program to include: (1) whether additional peers are needed, (2) places where

additional peers are needed, (3) burnout and salary issues, and (4) peer group diversity considerations

**Strategy 6:** Given that Walker County is currently designated as a health professional shortage area for mental health and mental health and substance use are often co-occurring disorders, there is a need to work with local and state mental health officials to increase the number of mental health professionals in the county.

## **OBJECTIVE 4: Community-led life-long recovery support**

Develop strategies which enhance citizen engagement toward a shared vision and commitment to improve the community health of Walker County by maintaining an effective network of prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery resources pertaining to mental health and substance use disorders.

- Strategy 1:** Establish a recovery community center that promotes citizen engagement in the county's recovery community, and supports the maintenance of the network of resources.
- Strategy 2:** Communicate support for a life-long recovery model and vision that fosters assimilation/re-assimilation.
- Strategy 3:** Work with every community to form its own committee, comprised of rotating members, with the goal to identify ways each has and can continue to improve the lives of individuals dealing with mental health and substance use issues.
- Strategy 4:** Assemble a group consisting of representatives from business and government organizations to develop recommendations designed to assist in the reassimilation of those in recovery.
- Strategy 5:** Identify and implement solutions for barriers which limit the number of companies employing residents in recovery.
- Strategy 6:** Plan and initiate a campaign through local churches, social media, and other avenues to attract volunteers to assist partner service providers.

## **OBJECTIVE 5: Harm reduction for those affected by addiction**

Reduce harm, including morbidity and mortality, related to substance use and mental health issues.

- Strategy 1:** Reduce harm by working to improve the public's perception toward residents facing issues with substance use and mental health issues.
- Strategy 2:** Improve access to primary care, treatment for HIV and Hepatitis C, and programs addressing associated harms to improve health outcomes among people who use drugs.
- Strategy 3:** Strengthen the county's overdose response infrastructure, including the following:
- Harm reduction education to county residents, including the use of naloxone and fentanyl test strips.
  - Statewide access to naloxone and fentanyl test strips via mail and partnerships with community-based organizations.
  - Crisis response teams that rapidly contact overdose survivors, including mobile crisis units.
  - Funding and technical assistance to expedite and improve overdose-related data, such as expediting toxicology to result in more accurate death records.
  - Ongoing review of real-time and historical overdose data to deploy resources accordingly.
- Strategy 4:** Participate in local, regional, and state advocacy that promotes the use of harm reduction strategies, including changes to state law that expand the number of healthcare professionals who can distribute naloxone to the public.