

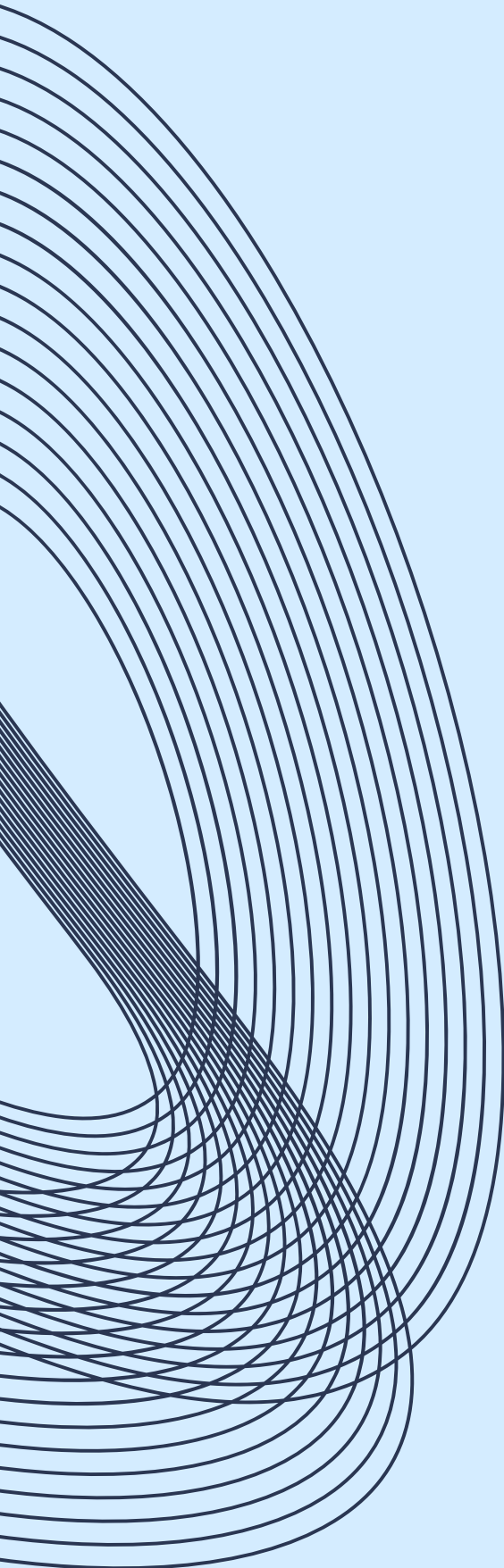
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2024

GRAND TRAVERSE

# FOCUS GROUP REPORT:

Substance Use Disorder:  
Recovery, Stigma, and  
Community



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all of the individuals who participated in our focus groups and for sharing your stories with us.

Thank you NACCHO, Northwest Community Health Innovation Region Behavioral Health Initiative, and District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) for providing funding for this research.

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# REPORT SUMMARY

## About the Substance Use Stigma Assessment and Response Project

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Funding from NACCHO, Northwest Community Health Innovation Region Behavioral Health Initiative, and District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) allowed staff to conduct focus groups in Manistee County, Wexford County, and Grand Traverse County with individuals in recovery.

The purpose of this report is to summarize and analyze the Grand Traverse focus group findings to assess the next steps to help individuals within our community.

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# FOCUS GROUP

## Overview

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The purpose of a focus group is to hear from individuals in the community to learn first hand from their experiences. This helps provide insight to barriers they may face, resources they may need, and how to best support them within the community.

The focus group took place in Grand Traverse County and was made up of eleven individuals who are in recovery for substance use disorder. For the purpose of this focus group, a person in recovery is defined as being in the process of change to improve their health and wellness, live a self directed life, and strive to reach their full potential. From SAMHA's working definition of recovery.



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# METHODOLOGY

## Planning and Recruitment

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Direct recruiting with the help of internal contacts was used to help assemble the focus groups.

Individuals were recruited based on their history of SUD.

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# METHODOLOGY

## Data Cleaning and Analysis Process

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The focus group was recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Word Transcribe function.

### Clean Transcripts

The text was reviewed for any errors to ensure accuracy, clarity, and consistency. Any formatting errors were corrected and any identifiable information was removed including names of individuals and professionals.

### Highlight Important Quotes

Once the transcript was cleaned, quotes were pulled out that were important to capture any main topic areas for each question asked.

### Finding Themes

Themes were found for each question that was asked to the individuals. Quotes are also highlighted for each of these themes. Overall themes from the focus group are shared as well.

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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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The individuals were asked about their reasons for initially beginning substance use. Here are the common themes that were found:

### Young Age Beginning Substance Use

Individuals shared started using substances at very young ages. They also identified a progression of drug use.

- "I was 11 years old when I started partying."
- "Yeah, by the time I was 10 years old, I was taking them (Pain Pills)."
- "...the first time I took a pill, I was like 15."
- "I started stealing mom's pain pills when I was 8-9 years old stealing cigarettes, smoking weed..."
- "I was 15-16 years old cooking dope in the wood shed out back."
- "I was drinking then; The drug came a little bit later."
- "I used to justify like, oh, I do pills. I don't do like coke. I don't do meth. I don't do heroin. But then, like, it got to a point like, well, I'm curious. I'm gonna try the coke. I try the coke and I made me feel the same way."
- "It went from Adderall when I started running out of my Adderall I just started. Started smoking meth and that shit like took a hold of me like quick!"



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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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### Trauma

Multiple participants described trauma, including during childhood, adulthood, and just overall trauma as a main reason for beginning substance use. Past traumatic experiences led to using substances as a coping mechanism.

- "I had no home life. My mom was always at work. You know, my dad was never around, so I had no structure. I mean, I basically raised my sister. So you know I grew up real quick"
- "I was around a very violent upbringing. You know, my family was always fighting. I watched my aunt stab my mom... . I grew up around a really violent family. But at the age of eight, I was beaten by my cousins, to steal my grandparents pain pills, they're eight years older than I was."
- "She was a really bad alcoholic, very abusive. Um Yeah. You know, a lot of the reason I kept doing drugs is from the trauma that I grew up with. I was also molested as a child."
- "My mom was working three jobs, had four kids. I'm the youngest of all my immediate siblings"
- "I was beaten by my cousins, you know it beat the shit out, I mean. Picked out my whole life. You know, I just became a rebel. I wanted to be the cool kid. I wanted to fit in."

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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "I grew up seeing a lot of shit that kids shouldn't grow up seeing, you know, my, my uncles and older cousins were running guns and weed. And it was, it was acceptable. In my family like. For the most part, and I started with pain pills when I was really young."
- "There was times that when I would get grounded, I didn't get grounded from the normal shit. I would get grounded from hot water. I couldn't take no hot water showers. I was in high school, I got grounded from using the washer and dryer, I had to take my clothes to the laundry mat."
- "In 2013, my son passed away at the age of 3 and a half. And that's where my alcoholism really started setting in. I, you know, I put alcohol before, before my daughter."
- "When my Mom passed. I didn't give a fuck about anything. And just stay out of my way. Let me make my money that was it."

### Overprescribing and Ease of Access to Substances

Participants shared their experiences with how easy they had access to substances, including overprescribing medications from doctors.

- "I Started selling them when I was like in middle school and kind of like the same thing like. My grandparents just had pain pills on pain pills in their in their cupboard."

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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "My grandparents had a fucking pharmacy in their house, you know, that was in the time of the era where you were old. You could go to the doctor and they write you a script. Write you a script, right. I mean, my grandma alone had six different prescriptions of six different kind of control substances, Oxycontin and Percocets. Roxi. Fucking norcos... anything you know, all of them different drugs."
- "...the doctor's got me on the pills and it just spiraled out of control from there. Went out. That was a, I probably spent a good ten years into the pills, prescription drugs, buying Oxy."
- "I had got hospitalized for (illness) and he started prescribing me norcos. And the doctor that I had the time, he gave me 750s and I called him a couple days later and said Doc, this shit ain't working. You know, he prescribed me a 160 thousand. And then I called a couple of days later and told him I was fucking depressed and shit so he prescribed me Xanax..."
- "I mean a very addictive personality, they were gone in no time. And then I can't do that shit responsibly. And then I was buying them off the black market, man, and I knew a lot of older folks that supplemented your income from it. So I would work seven days a week, man just to have opiates and benzos."

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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "I would go and steal all the cough syrup off the shelf at the store and like, put it into pharmaceutical like, you know, codeine bottles, like ones that I had had prescribed and resell it so I could go buy more Xanax."
- "I started stealing mom's pain pills when I was 8-9 years old stealing cigarettes, smoking weed, doing all the things you should be doing. Then as I got older, that's, I mean that stuff got boring. My older brothers were cooking, cooking dope, cooking Meth..."
- "My friend's older brothers and we could just get it from them or We knew some kids in school who could just go to the store and buy even though they were underage and A couple of my buddies had, like a spare house or their parents wouldn't care if we had a party, basically, so it was kind of a free for all, for quite a while."

# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

### Culture and Social Environment

Multiple participants shared how their social environment with family and friends influenced their substance use. Some participants also shared the peer pressure or societal pressure they faced.

- "...everybody was going out to, you know, these parties and having fun and. I wanted to join. And be along with it all."
- "...my family's a bunch of drinkers. So it was just socially acceptable for me to drink and I could drink at family gatherings when I was young..."
- "...it was just a social aspect. I never thought I would be an alcoholic or an addict. Like I didn't start thinking like, oh, this is going to be my end result, but it was just to have fun. To party, it was normal."
- "Probably when I was like 19 (\*I realized that my substance-use was no longer normal) Because I, at that point I had been buying from liquor stores since I was about 17 and I was going probably four or five times a week to get booze and I didn't need a fake ID or anything. I could just buy it so it was just if it was that easy, easily (accessible) for me to buy, then why not? And you know... I didn't grow up here. I had a lot of friends. That were doing the same thing."

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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "...by the time I was 10 years old, I started taking these pain pills and then by the time, you know by the time I hit high school I was the cool kid. I had all the pills I could sell all these pills, all these kids and you know, I was the dude. And before I was a nerd, nobody fucking really fucked with me. I got picked on, I was short and fat, you know, and I just. I completely went 180' after all that shit happened. Growing up and then, you know, I bought my first car, was selling my grandparents pain pills, stealing them and selling. That's how I bought my first car."
- "It got to that, to the point they (My grandparents) were like here, (name) here's all of our pills. Go sell them."
- "... I'm pretty sure I had learning. disability in school and I just drank to fit in and that's the crowd that I related to..."
- "I'd get up in the morning and start drinking and I drink. OK. You know, until I mean, if I ran out, if I if I ran out, I wasn't afraid to jump in the car. I went everywhere drinking man. I drink and drink and drove all over."
- "I was sick of being poor, watching my mom struggle... We were broke. We lived paycheck to paycheck"

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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "the way I got exposed to them, drugs like, you know, pills and shit was because I was trying to basically do what all my friends were doing in my generation like, You sold. You sold drugs, you know, I'm saying you sold pills like, you know, at high school, I was selling a lot of weed. From weed it went to pills..."
- "And after we're done cutting five cord of wood we could he would let me drink beer with me and all. And that was pretty young I was like 10 years old and. My parents, they would let me have a drink like at New Year's Eve and things like that when I was young. I can remember that. And I remember drinking my grandma's beer when we were even on our job. So it's always been there. It's always been, you know, back in these days I was. I was born in 75 so You know, it wasn't a big deal to let me drink a beer. I don't think they didn't think nothing of it. They weren't trying to make me become an alcoholic, but It it (alcoholism) definitely runs in my family."
- "I was 17 years old the, my first, first time I ever took a drink. I was in was in high school We had off campus lunches, so I went to my girlfriend's house, where she had an older brother, and so always some older kids would always go down there."



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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "...I basically got introduced to drinking and smoking weed from some of my best friends', older brothers. Just because you know they were experienced in that stuff and it just was cool that their older brothers were doing that and you know, for a long time I tried to not get involved, but um or, Not a long time, but I tried to not get involved and eventually I did."
- "...I wasn't vocal ever about me being in recovery or being clean and sober, and I was just... um to me, I was just a liar. I oh, I didn't... you know, I just don't go out. I just don't drink often, you know. So when they had a barbecue and I was, I was kind of just at the point where it's like, oh, I can, I could handle... It's not that I could NOT go to social things because I could do that. But like, I just felt like I could drink here."

### Mental Health

Individuals shared their experiences with mental health and the role it has played in their use of substances.

- "I started taking them initially because of depression."
- "...it all had to do with depression and Anxiety, you know not not being able to fit in."
- "I didn't give a fuck if I died. They died. We all got fucking raided, went to jail. I welcomed it."



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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "I try the coke and I made me feel the same way. Like I couldn't be touched. Like, you know, I was like, untouchable. Took my depression away. I took my my social anxiety with because I really have social anxiety still to this day, so like it would just make it very sociable. I always wanted to like I always admire people around me who could just walk in a room and like, you know. Immediately, just be comfortable and and Oh hi and talk to people. And I could. I could never do that, you know. So the coke really helped me do that."
- "Yeah, I was diagnosed (with ADHD as a kid) and I still Kind of struggle. With it, you know to this day. But I know like that, like the medication they have for it, it's just not going to work for me you know but. Yeah. So like. It went from Adderall when I started running out of my Adderall I just started. Started smoking meth and that shit like took a hold of me like quick!"
- "and I tried to blow my brother... I didn't try ... I took a 12 gauge Shotgun and put it in My mom's mouth and my brother's and I Was going to fucking kill them. Um Somehow, they got me to put the gun down"

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# FINDINGS

## Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

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- "I can't count how many times on both my hands and my feet, how many times I woke up Narcan in a fucking hospital bed, but so so many times pulled the shit out of my arms and I die as soon as I pull it out every time you didn't give a shit about dying. I wanted to die. At that point I crashed 14 cars within four months of each other trying to kill myself. I didn't give a fuck. I thought I was worthless piece of shit... to the world."
- "I mean people that I do talk to, I, I asked them that and they say same as you just said (name), I didn't give a shit. I'd I'd be happy to die. Seriously. (response) - I thought for a long time it would be a better place if I did."
- "I didn't give a fuck if I died. They died. We all got fucking raided, went to jail. I welcomed it."
- "I think for like myself when when I feel like I never had hope or I was hopeless and had no purpose or no meaning, really, like I wasn't doing anything and just...You know, I I take that drug or drink because in that little small instance, I didn't feel that way"

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# FINDINGS

## Finding Recovery Services

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The individuals were asked about when they decided to find recovery services and how they found services. Here is what they shared:

### Bad effects or outcomes from substances

Participants expressed both physical effects and life circumstances that motivated them to seek out recovery.

- "...the first time I went into treatment was 2016. I was 22 years old. I was in the hospital with my liver failing..."
- "My organs were failing again. I was in complete kidney failure"
- "...at this point I'm on like three or four Xanax. I've been up for 15 days straight."
- "The first time I went to any treatment facility or found out what um any AA or NA or any type of recovery program was 2017. I was 23. And I have been drinking every day for years and my.. My body was basically shutting down on me. I just kept getting dizzy and lightheaded and feeling like I'm like, seeing stars like I'd have to sit down really fast and otherwise I was going to pass out."
- "The tolerance doesn't matter how long you don't. You quit at least drinking for me, the tolerance is always there"
- "my longest my longest time awake (from substance use) was 27 days"

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# FINDINGS

## Finding Recovery Services

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### Receiving Help

Participants shared how they found recovery services and resources that were able to provide them help.

- "CMH helped me, I mean get ahold of NMRE."
- "...a lot of it is like you find some, you find something online, and you keep calling numbers until you get a hold of somebody"
- "I think my mom had told me to try NMRE. - In jail, that's the only free call there is - To NMRE? - yeah, so I they actually do some cool shit for me in jail when I run out of phone time, call at home, they call my family for me. Some of the people and..."
- "I called on when I went to Bear River. Um. I just googled it."
- "It's word of mouth for me around my brothers the guys that's been to Bear River and they're all like, yeah, you know, go to rehab"
- "I remember like there was sign on sign on the wall and jail wall and it was for um, for sober living and stuff. And I actually went into the Keys to Freedom sober living before I came to Unity."
- "I think I actually finally had enough maybe and I called the helpline on like a Thursday. And by the next Wednesday they had a detox. I had a detox appointment..."

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# FINDINGS

## Finding Recovery Services

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### Having Social Support

One individual shared how having positive social support can help their recovery process.

- "... I think it just has a lot to do with what you're doing and if you have people around you that are keeping you humble and grounded and honest."

### Relapse

Relapse was common for many of the participants. They shared their stories of returning to rehabilitation and their struggles with relapsing.

- "I went to three rounds of treatment. The first two times where times were unsuccessful, I didn't continue my recovery when I got out, I thought I could do it on my own and it led me back to the same place..."
- "I went to three treatments and the first two when I got out, I didn't go to meetings. I didn't get a sponsor that I failed... I failed myself."
- I was clean for 2 1/2 years. And then I decided to relapse again. You know, I quit using my tools in the program. I quit using my coping skills. I quit using the things I knew that worked. But the worst fucking part out of all of it is when I moved my environment from that house to where I moved to, with a bunch of drug addicts. Every one of my neighbors did drugs"

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# FINDINGS

## Difficulties Receiving Treatment

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When asked about the steps they took to find and receive treatment, participants expressed many struggles they faced due to reasons such as barriers to care and long wait times.

### Barriers Due to Money and Insurance

One of the barriers to care patients faced was due to the cost of care or medication.

- “(Treatment center) wouldn't take my insurance.”
- “Well, nobody down here took Upper Peninsula health plan of Michigan. It's Medicaid, but nobody took it.”
- “...And at that time, Medicaid didn't cover Suboxone. I had to pay for it out of my pocket. So my parents paid for it. And that got fucking way too expensive.”

### Long Wait Times

The wait times for receiving treatment were very long, many individuals sharing they had to wait weeks to get into treatment centers, especially for those coming out of incarceration.

- “(treatment center) won't have you a bed for like 6 days. So I'm up here, nowhere to go.”
- “they didn't have any beds available. So I ended up sitting the summer out and part of the winter in the homeless shelter”

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# FINDINGS

## Difficulties Receiving Treatment

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- "You're calling NMRE and they say we can't, you know, get you into detox for three or four days or whatever. And and I, I mean, to me that's I look at it the worst way to me, That's a death sentence to a person..."
- "It's tough when you get the news and you're you're actually willing to go somewhere because I feel like that's that window gets smaller and smaller and then they tell you, oh, we don't have something for two weeks."
- "But this time I called on a Thursday and I was in detox the following Wednesday... 5-6 days"
- "I waited 2 weeks."

### Lack of Resources

Individuals shared the lack of resources from hospitals and homeless shelters.

- "...a lot of hospitals won't even help you detox. Like if there's not a detox place that you can go to. A lot of times, hospitals will turn you away and I mean, that shit can be dangerous. And sometimes with like benzos and alcohol, you can fucking die."
- "And was trying to seek help through the homeless shelter, but they didn't have enough resources to get me to where I needed to be"

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# FINDINGS

## Difficulties Receiving Treatment

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### Quality of Care

A participant shared their experience with receiving treatment and the poor quality of services.

- “Well, and they have like a certain amount of food. So if you're not like one of the first people to get the food, you're not fucking eating.”

### Length of Treatment

One individual discussed their need to stay in treatment for an extended period of time due to the original time wasn't long enough.

- “I wound up staying 90 days this time because even after 45 days my head was still nothing.”



# OVERALL THEMES

## Needs for Supporting Those in Recovery

- **Limit Access to Substances**
  - Provide education on substances and the importance of not sharing prescribed medications with others as well as educating on keeping medications in spaces children can't access.
- **Decrease Overprescribing**
  - Limit prescriptions per patient of certain medications to prevent overuse or selling of substances.
- **Educate Youth on Substance Effects**
  - Provide education to children to try to prevent the early onset of substance use. Also being aware of signs of substance use to try to prevent addiction if a child or teen is already using substances.
- **Increase Mental Health Services**
  - Providing help for mental health issues and being able to create healthy coping mechanisms can help decrease substance use and decrease chances of relapse.
- **Decreased Time Before Treatment**
  - By getting into treatment faster and decreasing the wait times, this can help individuals with their recovery and prevent potential overdoses or harmful outcomes.

# OVERALL THEMES

## Recommendations

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- **Treatment with Mental Health Services**
  - Connect treatment centers to mental health services in order to strengthen the recovery process.
- **Providing Education in Schools**
  - Using schools to educate the youth allows for widespread education on substance use effects.
- **Increase Spread of Resources**
  - Providing more resources for substance use treatment or recovery help to areas such as homeless shelters.
- **Provide Education on Safe Medication Storage**
  - Educating individuals, especially parents or older adults, on storing their medication in safe areas out of reach of children or guests can help limit the ease of access to substances.