



# COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT OF THE OPIOID CRISIS IN LORAIN COUNTY, OHIO

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Background

The impact of the opioid crisis in Lorain County, Ohio is far-reaching and substantial, affecting an increasing number of individuals, families, and local communities. According to the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, prescription opioid misuse or abuse in Lorain County was 2.5 times the national average. Heroin use was more than double the U.S. average. The misuse of these drugs has clear, negative implications for community health, productivity, wealth, well-being, and happiness.

The Nord Family Foundation (NFF) in Lorain County sought to fully understand the nature of the local opioid crisis and identify currently available resources, existing needs, and strategies that could be implemented to address the crisis and lessen its negative impact. NFF engaged Altarum, a health research and consulting firm headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to conduct a community assessment and offer recommendations for addressing opioid misuse and related problems in Lorain County. The community assessment had four main objectives:

1. Define the extent of the opioid crisis and associated burdens on the county.
2. Identify county strengths and currently available resources for addressing opioid misuse and related problems.
3. Determine needs and potential barriers related to addressing the opioid crisis.
4. Identify potential strategies for mitigating the opioid crisis and its impact.

Four key activities were conducted to achieve the assessment objectives:

1. A quantitative impact assessment of the magnitude of the opioid crisis and its negative economic effects.
2. An environmental scan of treatment and recovery services currently available in Lorain County.
3. Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, including individuals and families affected by opioid misuse, substance use treatment and recovery service providers, social service organizations, medical providers, law enforcement, criminal justice, workforce development, higher education, faith-based organizations, and other local government agencies.
4. A web-based search for emerging, promising, and best practices currently being implemented by other States and localities across the United States to address the opioid crisis.



## Quantitative Impact Assessment Findings

### Magnitude of the Opioid Crisis

- ▲ 11.5% of Lorain County residents reported prescription opioid misuse or abuse in the past year, 2.5 times the national average and similar to the rate for the state of Ohio.
- ▲ 0.5% reported heroin use in the past year, double the national average.
- ▲ Opioid use contributed to 2,691 emergency department visits in Lorain County in 2016.
- ▲ Opioid overdose caused 132 deaths in Lorain County in 2016. This number is expected to increase in 2017.

### Economic Burden

The annual economic burden of the opioid crisis in Lorain County reached nearly \$200 million in 2016. The most significant economic impacts are lost wages, productivity, and tax revenues due to opioid-related fatalities and opioid use disorders; increased healthcare costs resulting from overdoses and indirect health complications; and additional criminal justice (police, judicial, and corrections) expenditures (see table).

#### *2016 ECONOMIC BURDEN OF LORAIN COUNTY OPIOID CRISIS*

Category	Estimate (in millions)
Lost Earnings/Productivity	\$139.8
Healthcare	\$42.9
Criminal Justice	\$7.2
Child and Family Assistance	\$4.5
Treatment and Prevention	\$5.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$199.8</b>

Individuals, the Federal Government, and the private sector bear the greatest burden of the opioid crisis primarily through lost individual wages and Federal tax revenues, Medicaid and Medicare expenditures, and decreased workforce. Fewer economic costs fall to State and local governments in the form of lost tax revenues and State expenditures for Medicaid and Medicare, criminal justice, and child and family assistance. Despite the significant costs of preventable and untreated opioid use disorders, comparatively little was spent on treatment and prevention efforts in 2016.



## Environmental Scan Findings

- ▲ 18 organizations provide substance use treatment or recovery services in at least one location in Lorain County.
- ▲ Nearly all services are located in the northern half of the county near Elyria and Lorain. Very few services are available in the more rural area south of I-480.
- ▲ No subacute or inpatient detox facility exists in Lorain County.
- ▲ No medically managed inpatient services are available for individuals with a primary diagnosis of a substance use disorder.
- ▲ Only one residential treatment facility is available for women, and no residential facilities exist for men.
- ▲ Availability of medication assisted treatment and recovery housing services is limited.
- ▲ More availability exists for intensive outpatient, outpatient, and some recovery support services.
- ▲ More services are available for individuals with a primary mental health diagnosis and a co-occurring substance use disorder.

## Stakeholder Interview and Focus Group Findings

- ▲ The opioid crisis directly or indirectly touches every member of the Lorain County community.
- ▲ The number of strong community-based organizations in Lorain County and the willingness of stakeholders to collaborate are two key strengths that will be helpful in addressing the opioid crisis.
- ▲ Community problems exacerbated by the opioid crisis include increased crime, economic impacts, and the breakdown of the family unit.
- ▲ The opioid crisis creates increased burden on agencies serving the community, including law enforcement, emergency responders, criminal justice, corrections, coroner's office, children's services, treatment providers, hospitals, the faith community, and social service organizations.
- ▲ Barriers to accessing services exist, such as delays in receiving services, gaps in the types of services available, and lack of public transportation.
- ▲ Current service providers are professional, knowledgeable, caring, passionate, and resilient, creating a strong base to build upon.
- ▲ County-level challenges related to addressing the opioid crisis include a lack of awareness about opioid use disorders across the community, insufficient funding, separation of services and agencies for mental health and substance use, competition among providers, and lack of a comprehensive, up-to-date list of available resources.



## Best and Promising Practices Findings

- ▲ To date, most research regarding strategies to address the opioid crisis has concerned interventions implemented within healthcare settings, which have demonstrated positive effects.
- ▲ Development of community coalitions has been instrumental in creating the community buy-in necessary to implement effective opioid-related interventions and strategies.
- ▲ Harm reduction strategies such as safe injection sites and nonprescription syringe availability have been associated with increased referrals to addiction treatment and general healthcare, reduced overdose mortality, and reduced injection-related bacterial infections.
- ▲ Peer certification models, including Ohio's approach, recognize the importance of peer influence and clearly validate the use of peers as valuable stakeholders and partners to many interventions.
- ▲ Lorain County is currently implementing a number of interventions that have shown promise at curtailing the negative impacts of the opioid crisis. These interventions include peer recovery coach integration in emergency departments, expansion of naloxone/Narcan access, integration of quick response teams, and treatment/recovery drug courts.

## Recommendations

After the brief but intensive observation of the landscape and culture surrounding the opioid crisis in Lorain County, Altarum recommends that Lorain County embark on recovery-focused behavioral health system transformation. We offer six strategies that, when effectively implemented, can be expected to reap rapid and long-term success in the county's effort to address the opioid crisis.

1. Further develop efforts to encourage multiple stakeholder involvement and collaborative decision-making.
  - ▲ Identify an impartial coordinating entity to facilitate collaboration.
  - ▲ Develop inclusive collaborations that will foster sharing and leveraging of resources.
  - ▲ Increase collaboration between the Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services Board and the Mental Health Board.
2. Develop a full continuum of culturally appropriate and accessible care and related services.
  - ▲ Prevention.
  - ▲ Detox.
  - ▲ Treatment.
  - ▲ Recovery supports.
  - ▲ Harm reduction.



3. Institute an education component.
  - ▲ Public anti-stigma campaign.
  - ▲ Dissemination of information about existing resources.
  - ▲ Prevention education, including limiting the prescription of legal opioids.
4. Review current state policies.
  - ▲ Assess whether policy changes are necessary to better address the opioid crisis.
  - ▲ Develop an advocacy strategy that aligns with the county's priorities.
5. Develop a system of data collection and coordination.
  - ▲ Collect, track, and report individual and systems-level outcome data to improve the system of care.
  - ▲ Ensure data are collected regarding specific strategies to address the opioid crisis in order to assess effectiveness.
  - ▲ Establish real-time data alert procedures to identify potential spikes in overdose cases.
6. Develop a plan to disseminate information related to addressing the opioid crisis.
  - ▲ Results and recommendations from the community assessment.
  - ▲ Implementation plan.
  - ▲ Updates on current and planned efforts to address the opioid crisis.