UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 41,000 Americans died from an opioid overdose in 2016.1 The states with the highest rates of overdose in 2016 were West Virginia, Ohio and New Hampshire, and 22 states and the District of Columbia had overdose rates significantly higher than the national average. Individuals and families are in desperate need of help, yet local support systems are struggling to meet the growing demand.

How can communities identify and implement solutions that make an immediate impact while maximizing capacity to provide long-term recovery supports?

THE SOLUTION

Altarum offers a field-tested, evidence-based approach that improves outcomes and builds community capacity to stop the opioid crisis. Our approach draws on best practices as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s framework for identifying effective public health interventions.

HOW ALTARUM HELPED AN OHIO COUNTY

From 2014 to 2016, Ohio was leading the nation in the number of opioid overdose deaths.2 Lorain County, a suburb west of Cleveland with a population of 300,000, was hit particularly hard with more than 130 deaths from fatal opioid overdoses in 2016—more than double the number in 2015. Community leaders knew they had to take swift action to stop the deaths and deliver treatment and recovery services to those in need. In response to this overwhelmingly high rate of opioid misuse and related deaths, the local Nord Family Foundation commissioned Altarum to further understand the nature of the problem and identify resources, needs, and potential solutions.

Phase One: Understanding the Problem

Altarum completed an environmental scan and identified geographic gaps in the distribution of existing local treatment and recovery services. After identifying existing resources and services in the county, we determined the challenges and gaps that were hindering the community’s ability to respond at full capacity. Altarum also completed a quantitative impact analysis of the downstream economic burden of the crisis—nearly $200 million in 2016 alone – revealing that comparatively little was being spent on treatment and prevention. This analysis served as a foundation to determine where and what type of interventions would be most effective.

Phase Two: Community Engagement and Strategic Planning

Altarum conducted interviews and focus groups with dozens of local stakeholders, including those in recovery services, social services, law enforcement, health care, criminal justice, workforce development, higher education, faith-based service, and government. By engaging with organizations on the frontlines of the crisis, Altarum uncovered a strong willingness to collaborate across the community. We then delivered an outline of concrete strategies and tasks for local implementation. Leveraging this collaborative effort, the community formed a Task-Force to end the epidemic.

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1 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db294.pdf
2 https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/opioid-overdose-death-rates/?currentTimeframe=2&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Opioid%20Overdose%20Death%20Rate%20(Age-Adjusted)%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D
Phase Three: Identifying Best Practices and Recommendations for Action

Altarum conducted a systematic review of evidence-based practices to address opioid addiction currently in place in other states and localities across the United States. We then provided an assessment of Lorain County’s community-based efforts, including both the process and outcomes resulting from the work. Finally, Altarum provided a comprehensive report and roadmap for behavioral health system transformation in Lorain County.

A MODEL FOR COMMUNITIES NATIONWIDE

Altarum’s work revealed that the opioid crisis in Lorain County could be reduced through local efforts to: encourage stakeholder involvement and collaborative decision-making; establish a full continuum of care; institute community education; assess the need for policy changes; establish a system for data collection; and disseminate information. Lorain County is now actively working to reduce the opioid crisis through local implementation and community collaboration. These efforts can be a model for other counties and states seeking to do more with their current resources through stronger coordination and targeting services where they are needed most.

Read the Community Assessment of the Opioid Crisis in Lorain County, Ohio Executive Summary.*

Contact Altarum today to learn how you can build a safer and more responsive opioid use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery system for your community.

* https://altarum.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-publication-files/Lorain-County-Community-Assessment_Executive-Summary.pdf