Together, We Heal as One

The Walker County Health Action Partnership is a coalition of organizations committed to making Walker County a healthier place to live, work and play.

The Health Action Partnership received funding from the Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA) to better understand the issues and challenges pertaining to an opioid and heroin problem in Walker County, Alabama. This planning grant supported a strategic planning process in which local organizations met regularly to conduct a needs assessment, collect comprehensive data and develop the multi-year strategic plan presented in this report.

The coordination and collaboration supported by the grant will be sustained through the Health Action Partnership's newly created priority group, the Behavioral Health Priority Group.

Snapshot of Walker County's Epidemic

50%
of households have at least one member who is experiencing chronic pain.

4 DAYS
That's how long it can take for an opioid prescription to result in continued use.

25%
of patients with a 12-day supply of opioids were still using one year later.

From 2006–2012,

83.5 MILLION
opioid doses legally entered Walker County. That's 178 doses per person, per year. Four out of the top 10 Alabama cities and towns for opioid prescribing rates are in Walker County.

In Sumiton:	**687**	**PILLS PER PERSON**
In Sipsey:	**511**	**PILLS PER PERSON**
In Dora:	**482**	**PILLS PER PERSON**
In Jasper:	**458**	**PILLS PER PERSON**

"I am concerned about opioid-related abuse in Walker County because it has become generational. We are seeing grandparents, parents and children (15-16) with the same problems. It is seen as a new normal to seek out medication."
Comment from a Local Leader

Multi-Year Strategic Plan

Improve the community health of Walker County residents by creating a comprehensive network of prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery resources related to substance use disorder and mental health.

OUR GOAL

"Make recovery affordable–not so much the inpatient part, but the outpatient part. Help get people to outpatient so they can work and have a normal life."
Comment from a Recovering Walker County Individual

OBJECTIVE 1
Community education on risks harms, and resources

Educate Walker County residents and stakeholders on the risks of opioid use disorders and interrelated mental health issues, as well as effective prevention, treatment and recovery options.

STRATEGY 1: Enhance existing, age-appropriate evidence-based education in Walker County regarding the risks of illegal drug use, prescription drug misuse, related mental health issues and safe disposal of medications.

STRATEGY 2: Train youth and adult educators to conduct education and outreach activities around mental health and substance use in school and community settings.

STRATEGY 3: 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 need access to local resources and treatment services.

STRATEGY 4: Create and implement campaigns aimed at selected segments (youth, young adults, current users) to increase knowledge and awareness of substance use and related mental health issues, including prevention, treatment and recovery resources.

Notes:

"The step that locked me up was super friendly. Made me see what I was really doing, not to just me, but to my kids."
Comment from a Recovering Walker County Individual

OBJECTIVE 2
Prevention and intervention by health professionals

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

STRATEGY 1: Look for opportunities to expand the use of the evidence-based practice, Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) among agencies who conduct intake assessments.

STRATEGY 2: Create intake and crisis intervention sites in underserved communities, including mobile response teams that rapidly contact recent overdose survivors.

STRATEGY 3: Provide education to patients receiving opioid medications regarding the risk of addiction and misuse.

STRATEGY 4: Use provider-pharmacist collaborative proactive agreements to provide appropriate pain management to patients with chronic pain as well as palliative care patients.

STRATEGY 5: Ensure all licensed providers in Walker County permitted to prescribe/dispense controlled substances be required to register with a prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP).

STRATEGY 6: Encourage continuing education on evidence-based guidelines for the appropriate prescribing of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and other relevant topics for addiction treatment providers and primary care providers.

Notes:

"I went into recovery because I wanted to be a better mom. I wanted to be someone my child deserved."
Comment from a Recovery Walker County Individual

OBJECTIVE 3
Equitable and timely treatment options

Ensure equitable and timely access to quality substance use disorder treatment and recovery support services.

STRATEGY 1: Form a task-force of providers to develop a comprehensive plan that improves coordination among all providers.

STRATEGY 2: Evaluate the effectiveness of programs providing medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to identify opportunities for enhancing treatment and recovery.

STRATEGY 3: Recruit more not-for-profit treatment providers that complete a continuum of care to Walker County to help those without insurance/those who cannot afford to pay for treatment.

STRATEGY 4: Identify methods and models to increase the chances that clients will stay engaged with their treatment plan, which should include necessary recovery support services such as housing, transportation and employment.

STRATEGY 5: Expand and enhance criminal justice deflection and diversion programs that serve individuals with drug-related cases.

Notes:

"We have seen an a 50% increase in the number of substance use disorder treatment cases we see in the last two years."
Comment from a Direct Service Provider

OBJECTIVE 4
Community-led lifelong recovery support

Enhance citizen engagement toward a goal of a shared vision of understanding and commitment for solving the county's opioid and substance use crisis.

STRATEGY 1: Support a lifelong recovery model and vision that fosters assimilation/re-assimilation.

STRATEGY 2: Identify and implement solutions for barriers that limit the number of companies employing residents in recovery.

STRATEGY 3: Work with every community to form its own committee, comprised of rotating members, with the goal of identifying ways each has improved the lives of individuals dealing with substance use issues.

STRATEGY 4: Plan and initiate a campaign to attract volunteers to assist indirect providers. (Indirect providers include entities that provide services or resources relevant to lifelong recovery.)

Notes:

"My employer did not play a role in my recovery because I didn't tell I was in recovery. I was afraid I would be let go."
Comment from a Recovering Walker County Individual

OBJECTIVE 5
Healthy lives for those affected by addiction

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

STRATEGY 1: 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 2: Increase access to harm reduction education to county residents, including naloxone distribution points.

STRATEGY 3: Use peers with lived experience to engage individuals with substance use disorders in harm-reduction programs and services.

STRATEGY 4: Identify and fill gaps preventing local law enforcement efforts from using existing laws to reduce the supply of methamphetamines, heroin and illegal opioids in Walker County.

STRATEGY 5: Identify and collect data that accurately identifies the prevalence of morbidity and mortality associated with substance use.

STRATEGY 6: Participate in local regional, and state advocacy that promotes the use of harm-reduction strategies.

Notes:

"To begin to deal with our opioid problem, we must educate the public and providers on alternatives, enforcing limitations on what can be prescribed."
Comment from a Local Leader