



 RAMSEY COUNTY

MARCH 2025

# OPIOID RESPONSE OVERVIEW

Funding the response, evaluating the data, creating programming and taking a look forward.

# The opioid crisis is here.

The opioid epidemic is a national public health crisis. Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, with opioids being the most common drug. Opioids are a class of drugs that includes the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), morphine and xylazine. In total, more than 5,400 Minnesotans have died of opioid overdoses since the year 2000. Ramsey County communities continue to be impacted by opioids; it is our responsibility to respond to this ongoing crisis.

## Funding

Ramsey County is receiving funding from a variety of sources to address the opioid epidemic. The funding will be paid until at least 2038 and will total in the millions. The opioid settlement funds alone will bring over \$26 million to Ramsey County's Opioid Response Initiative. The settlement funds are just one source of funding being used to address the opioid crisis, as a variety of federal and state grants also support this important work.

### OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDING

In 2021, the Minnesota Attorney General's Office joined historic multistate settlement agreements with pharmaceutical distributors and opioid manufacturers. The parties to these settlements are states, cities and counties. The Attorney General's Office reached an agreement with Minnesota cities and counties on how funds from these settlements would be allocated: 75% to counties and cities and 25% to the state.

The agreement designates Minnesota's local public health departments as the lead agencies and chief strategists to identify, collaborate and respond to local issues and decide how to leverage and disburse settlement funds. They do this by fostering community-focused and collaborative, evidence-informed approaches that prevent and address addiction across the areas of public health, human services and public safety. The agreement also details how the funds can be used to combat the opioid crisis, providing detailed strategies for treatment, prevention and other activities. Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health serves as the

chief facilitator, convenor and strategist for the county's Opioid Response Initiative.

Over \$26 million will be brought into Ramsey County's Opioid Response Initiative from 2022 – 2038 to address the ongoing crisis. As of February 25, 2025, the county has received \$8,829,295; the rest of the funding will be distributed in staggered amounts over the next 13 years. The next round of funds is expected to be distributed in July 2025, totaling \$1,575,109.75. Of the settlement funding the county has received, approximately \$2,298,000 has been spent on the Naloxone Distribution Pilot Project and the first round of the Opioid Response Community Grants. Learn more about both programs on page four of this document.

### FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS

#### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA)

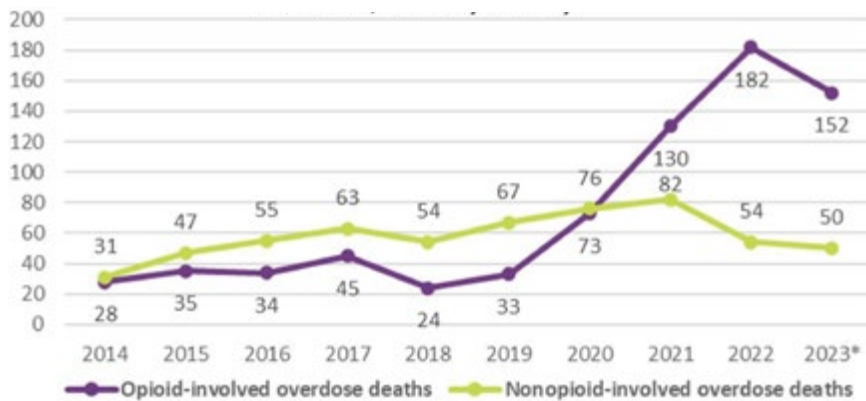
In 2023, Ramsey County was awarded just under \$500,000 per year for five years from SAMSHA to support the work of Recovery Connect. Recovery Connect creates comprehensive, coordinated and evidence-based treatment and housing referrals for justice-involved and unsheltered community members with substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health conditions. The strategies used in this program include case management, the use of medication for opioid use disorder, referrals to licensed opioid treatment programs, recovery group programming, outreach and harm reduction education, and recovery support services.

#### Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS): Opioid Epidemic Response Services

Ramsey County was awarded \$1.2 million from Nov. 2023 until the end of June 2026 from the DHS Opioid Epidemic Response Advisory Council (OERAC). The funding is being used to implement a Harm Reduction and Treatment Connection project that aims to expand community access to harm reduction services, treatment and referrals. Specifically, the project works with justice-involved individuals, people experiencing homelessness, and ethnic communities disproportionately impacted by opioid use disorder, including African American and American Indian communities. Services and resources are provided at Ramsey County correctional facilities, the Syringe Service Program at Clinic 555, and the mobile medical unit.

# The data

## FATAL DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS IN RAMSEY COUNTY



\*Preliminary data  
Source: CDC Wonder/MDH ([health.state.mn.us/communities/opioids/documents/countyopioidinvolvedtable2.pdf](https://health.state.mn.us/communities/opioids/documents/countyopioidinvolvedtable2.pdf))

Possible causes for the decrease in opioid-involved deaths include:

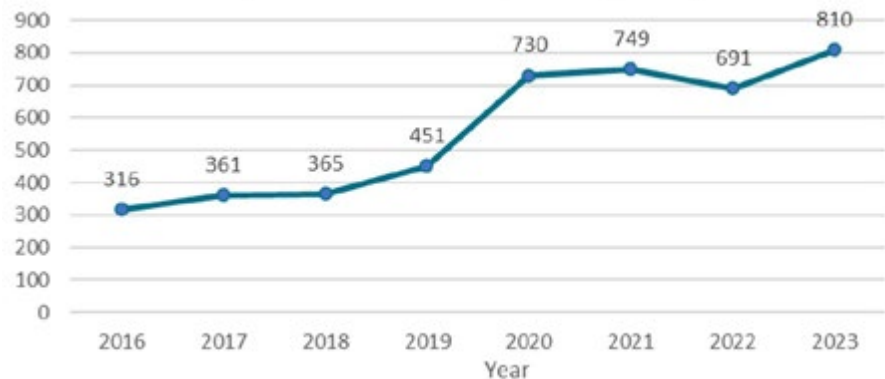
- Significant funding dedicated to opioid remediation work.
- More widespread awareness and use of naloxone.
- Less stigma with getting help and treatment for drug misuse.
- Potency of opioids has decreased due to more oversight of substances coming into the U.S. by the DEA.

### FINDINGS

Opioid-involved deaths decreased 16.5% between 2022 and 2023 in Ramsey County. This was the first time deaths decreased since 2018.

About 75% of all drug-overdose deaths involve opioids.

## NONFATAL OPIOID-RELATED HOSPITAL VISITS IN RAMSEY COUNTY AMONG RESIDENTS



Source: Minnesota Department of Health personal communication in Sept. 2023; data from Minnesota Hospital Association patient discharge records, including resident visits at any Minnesota or North Dakota

### FINDINGS

Between 2022 and 2023, Ramsey County residents made 17.2% more visits to hospital emergency departments for opioid involved overdoses.

This data does not include the following:

- Nonfatal overdoses occurring out in the community.
- People treated by EMS and not transferred to a hospital.
- Visits at federal health facilities (e.g., VA, Indian Health Service), tribally operated facilities, or other out-of-state facilities.



# Programming, health services and outreach

## NALOXONE TRAINING FOR COUNTY STAFF

Since 2022, the SPRCPH opioid peer specialist trained over 1,200 county staff on how to use naloxone and other harm-reduction resources. The 78 trainings included participation from senior and executive leadership. Over 1000 individuals were trained through this program in 2023. Nasal naloxone was given to each employee who completed the training. Funding from the 2022 Department of Human Services Opioid Epidemic Response Advisory Council grant supported this program.

## SYRINGE SERVICE PROGRAM

The Syringe Service Program (SSP) is a part of Clinic 555, a health clinic centrally located in downtown Saint Paul. The location was chosen to increase accessibility for communities disproportionately impacted by substance-use disorder and HIV, including people who are low-income, racially and ethnically diverse and/or experiencing homelessness. Participants use the Syringe Service Program to dispose of used syringes and get new ones to reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C while connecting to additional wrap around services such as overdose prevention services.

The clinic offers a range of services including naloxone kit distribution; wound care; drug testing strips; access to PrEP; overdose prevention education; HIV, Hepatitis C, STI testing and linkage to care; and referrals to substance use disorder treatment, medical care, mental health and social services.

Services are offered in a nonjudgmental and respectful fashion in order to build relationships. Staff prioritizes relationships with community partners so that they can meet the diverse needs of clients. In the first 11 months of 2024, the SSP saw 1,562 individuals at 3,521 visits. Program staff distributed 413,365 syringes to individuals and 196,365 syringes were returned. Learn more about Clinic 555 and the SSP at [ramseycounty.us/Clinic555](https://ramseycounty.us/Clinic555).



## CLINIC 555 CAREVAN

The Clinic 555 mobile CareVan, pictured above, is a mobile clinic bringing health and wellness to communities that don't have easy access to health care services. The van was made to expand healthcare options by bringing them directly to underserved communities. It works with partners to serve a wide variety of clients and community members at substance use and mental health treatment centers, drop-in health centers, events and other happenings in the county.

Community partners can request the CareVan to visit their events. So far, the CareVan has participated in events held by Saint Paul Pride, Twin Cities Pride, CLUES, the Anika Foundation and Rainbow Health, among other organizations. To submit a request and view the current schedule, visit [ramseycounty.us/CareVan](https://ramseycounty.us/CareVan).

## NALOXONE DISTRIBUTION PILOT PROJECT

In December 2023, Public Health launched an initial Naloxone Distribution Pilot project. The goal of the project was to increase access to naloxone for residents who need it. Each kit included two doses of nasal naloxone, instructions about how to administer naloxone and other harm-reduction resources. The printed resources included a QR code that lead to an instructional video "How to use Naloxone" developed specifically for this campaign. It has over 860 views so far. Residents were invited to place online orders for naloxone kits that were mailed directly to their homes.

Orders were accepted from Dec. 11, 2023 - Jan. 26, 2024. In total, 1,571 households received naloxone kits as a result of the pilot project. Throughout the rest of 2024, 910 naloxone kits were distributed to community partners. This distribution project was funded by Minnesota's settlements with opioid companies.

## 2024 OPIOID RESPONSE COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

In June 2024, seventeen community organizations were awarded between \$40,000 and \$55,000 for nine months from the county's settlement funds. The Opioid Response Community Grant program offers funding and support for organizations whose work aligns with the county's Opioid Response Initiative priority areas, which include:

- Pregnant and parenting people and babies.
- Culturally-specific treatment.
- Health education focused on prevention.
- Treatment and support for those involved with the justice system.
- Youth engagement to prevent substance misuse.

Grants were awarded to the following organizations in each priority area.

**The Katallaso Group and First Step Recovery** received up to \$55,000 each to educate families about treatment options and effects of opioid use on pregnancy; treatment and recovery services for uninsured or underinsured people with opioid use disorder and provide support and care for children and family members impacted by opioid addiction.

**Urban Village, Restorative Reiki Health, Minnesota Community Care and Stronger Sober House** were funded to provide culturally-specific approaches for treatment and recovery. Each organization was awarded up to \$55,000 for implementation of workforce development training in multiple languages; increasing community awareness of resources and treatment options; and providing culturally specific case management services for racially and ethnically diverse people.

**The Amherst Wilder Foundation, African American Survivor Services, St. Philip's Ventures and Vietnamese Community of Minnesota** received funding for their work to do health education and outreach focused on opioid use prevention. Each organization was awarded up to



\$50,000 for training community on naloxone use, developing and implementing culturally specific messaging and outreach strategies, community health education.

**Roots Wellness Center, Ainga Mental Health and Consulting and Begin Anew Recovery** received funding to support their work providing treatment and support for people involved in the justice system. Each organization was awarded up to \$40,000 for providing transportation to and from treatment or other substance use related services, connecting people to pre-trial services, resources and care, among other work.

**Lutheran Social Services Streetworks, Karen Organization of Minnesota, Face 2 Face and the JK Movement** received funding for their work to educate and engage young people. Each organization was awarded up to \$50,000 to develop educational materials in collaboration with youth and young adults, host community health education and drug prevention events at schools, libraries or recreation centers, and train youth to educate their peers about naloxone among other relevant work.

In total, the grants program offered up to \$1 million to community organizations. Any funding not awarded to a grantee was used to purchase program-related supplies and resources for grantees to use in their work. Find more information about the program at [ramseycounty.us/OpioidGrants](https://ramseycounty.us/OpioidGrants).



# Looking forward

## Upcoming programming and activities

- Transition the Opioid Settlement funding work to the Center for Public Health Protection and Practice.
- Build the capacity of our internal team, working on hiring staff.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the first round of Opioid Response Community Grant program and make pivots where needed.
- Host the third Opioid Response Initiative Partnership meeting to strategize and plan outreach and community engagement.
- Continue to gather Ramsey County specific data as related to the opioid crisis.
- Complete a big-picture, landscape assessment of all opioid-related data to inform decision making.
- Create an action plan for the Ramsey County Opioid Response Initiative.
- Open up applications for the second round of the Opioid Response Community Grant program and execute grants by the end of 2025.
- Host the second annual Ramsey County Jurisdictions meeting.