



# 2021

## ANNUAL REPORT

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## About the Consortium

The Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention coordinates Colorado’s response to the misuse of medications such as opioids, stimulants, and sedatives. The Consortium’s mission is to reduce prescription drug misuse and abuse in Colorado by developing policies, programs, and partnerships with the many Colorado agencies, organizations, and community coalitions addressing one of the state’s major public health crises.

The Consortium is part of the Center for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention at the University of Colorado Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, located at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus.



## Consortium staff

Robert Valuck	Executive Director
José Esquibel	Director
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Jennifer Place	Program Manager
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Jessica Eaddy	Senior External Relations Strategist
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Judy Solano	External Relations Strategist
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# Reflecting Back

As we bring 2021 to a close, I’d like to begin our annual report by looking back on our second year of living and working together during a pandemic, remaining focused on our mission of addressing opioid and other substance use disorders in Colorado.

To say that pandemic life is challenging is, of course, a gross understatement. Living and working during COVID-19 has required us all to adapt, to learn new ways of communicating and collaborating, and I am grateful for the hard work that everyone has put in to make it possible for us to continue our mission. But COVID-19 did more than just cause us to change how we work, it caused a lot of additional pain and suffering for our population—both from the disease itself, and from exacerbating problems of social isolation, depression, anxiety, and other stresses brought on by the major changes in how we are able to interact with others during these challenging times. Substance misuse has increased, drug overdoses are at an all-time high, and we still face severe shortages of many essential programs and services in the face of rapidly growing need. Our challenges are clear, and they are substantial. But we will continue to band together, collaborate, and fight the good fight to make positive change across our state.



Through all of these challenges, the Consortium staff has been tremendous, continuing to work hard on all sorts of projects, showing flexibility in adjusting to evolving roles and circumstances, and remaining positive and upbeat despite the circumstances. The same can be said for our many partners and colleagues across Colorado: from our work group co-chairs and members, to the local coalitions, nonprofit organizations, and community members that we interact with and support; to our state agency leaders and staff, who deliver essential programs and bring sectors together in support of their missions; and to our state legislators and elected leaders, who continue to listen to community needs and create policies to better the lives of Coloradans. I have always believed, and continue to believe, that we will be successful in our mission if we continue to work together, talk with and listen to each other, and remain dedicated to the important work that we all have chosen to undertake together.

We have done a lot of good things together over the past eight years, and will continue to do good things, by reflecting on our past, rejuvenating our minds, bodies, and relationships, and rededicating ourselves to our work. I thank each of you for your contributions, and look forward to 2022 with optimism and gratitude.

Most sincerely,

**Robert Valuck PhD, RPh**

Professor, University of Colorado Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
Executive Director, University of Colorado Center for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention

# 2021 Highlights

For the Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention, 2021 was a year of new partnerships in the face of new challenges. We developed new or closer relationships with state leaders and took on new roles as we were entrusted to play an important role in the Colorado's response to the overdose crisis and to assist in improving the behavioral health care system. We worked with dozens of community groups and local governments in all parts of the state as they started or led important local programs.

Meanwhile, we continued to build on years of success developing and coordinating innovative programs for mitigating the opioid crisis in Colorado. Examples include expanding our provider education offerings, improving our public awareness materials, and supporting the state's medication-assisted treatment programs.

With the number of opioid overdose deaths rising as fentanyl-laced drugs become more widespread, the work we do along with our partners is more important than ever, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to strain the behavioral health care system. Fortunately, the Consortium acquired funding to provide ongoing support to our partners.

## Helping transform Colorado's behavioral health care system

Even in the best of times, it is a challenge to provide needed services and support to people with substance use and mental health disorders. With the overdose crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic straining the system, it became clear reform was needed.

In 2021, Colorado leaders launched the Behavioral Health Transformational Task Force. Its charge is to identify gaps in the system, propose systemic changes, and recommend how to allocate the \$450 million from the American Rescue Plan Act that the legislature allocated for behavioral health services.

The bipartisan task force was led by legislators and the directors of major state departments. A representative of the Consortium was one of 25 subject matter experts that provided guidance to the task force, especially in our domain of opioid use and overdose prevention. We also helped inform recommendations that the Governor and General Assembly will consider in the next legislative session.

## Contributing to landmark legislation

Since our founding, the Consortium has provided members of Colorado General Assembly with support as they evaluate issues, develop strategies, and enact laws. This year was no exception, as we helped in the creation of the landmark Behavioral Health Recovery Act, or Senate Bill 21-137.

The act invested more than \$112 million to address urgent behavioral health needs. This included support for services for substance use, mental health, and recovery programs, substance use prevention, workforce development, and care coordination. The act also established the Behavioral Health Transformational Task Force and reserved \$450 million for behavioral health.

Funds from the act are supporting naloxone distribution, syringe access programs, and medication-assisted treatment. The Consortium also received funding for community engagement, provider education, grant writing assistance, and public awareness.

The legislature passed seven other bills related to the Consortium's work. These included measures about benzodiazepine prescribing, insurance coverage, peer professional support, and the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program.

## Supporting our partners

The Consortium received money from the Legislature in 2021 to review and support programs that would train and educate healthcare, behavioral healthcare, and public health professionals, promote the use of evidence-based models of care for treatment of pain and substance use disorders, and further strengthen recovery support programs and services.

The Consortium solicited and considered proposals and funds will be distributed in 2022.



Gov. Jared Polis signs the Behavioral Health Recovery Act, which invested more than \$112 million in urgent behavioral health needs and reserves another \$450 million over coming years. He is joined by Rep. Chris Kennedy, Sen. Kevin Priola, Rep. Leslie Herod, and Sen. Brittany Pettersen.



# Preparing for opioid settlement funds

Colorado is one of dozens of states suing the manufacturers and distributors of opioid pain medication. The lawsuits in federal courts are to hold companies accountable for the damage they have caused.

The Attorney General is leading Colorado’s legal effort, and the Consortium is helping his office engage communities as they identify priorities and develop strategies. Our work includes connecting stakeholders, elected officials, and government staff to resources and experts, participating in strategic planning meetings, and making sure communities are ready to make effective investments once they receive funds. The Consortium works alongside the Colorado Municipal League and Colorado Counties, Inc. in this effort.

As of December 2021, Colorado is expected to receive around \$400 million to spend over 18 years. More funds are expected as legal action continues.

# Medication-Assisted Treatment expansion

The Consortium is partnering with the CU College of Nursing and School of Medicine on increasing access to medication-assisted treatment. Thanks to a \$5 million allocation from the legislature in 2019, the Medication-Assisted Treatment Expansion Program treated 1,543 new individuals and trained 32 new health care providers over the past two years. The program enabled eight organizations to operate 50 clinical sites in 21 rural and frontier counties. The program has been extended as part of the Behavioral Health Recovery Act.



1,543 new people treated  
50 clinical sites  
21 rural and frontier counties served

# Grant writing assistance

Supporting other organizations so they can succeed is one of our most important roles. Our program to help nonprofits and local government agencies find grants and apply for funds is an example of our success. Recovery organizations, local public health departments, harm reduction centers, and drug abuse prevention organizations are among the many to have benefited from grant writers contracted with the Consortium.

In 2021, 10 organizations won 13 grants totaling \$2.6 million, a 28:1 return on the \$91,483 spent by the program. Since 2019, 47 organizations have won grants totaling \$15,414,113 million, a 37:1 return. All told, 95 organizations have received assistance through the program.

2021/Cumulative total	
Number of organizations that won grants	10/47
Number of winning grants	13/49
Total money awarded	\$2,630,521/ \$15,414,113
Organizations assisted	26/95
Total spent by the program	\$91,483/ \$383,460
Return	28:1/37:1

3,005  
Health care professionals  
trained in 2021



639  
Dental care providers trained  
in new continuing education program



19  
Online modules



# Educating new providers

Providing education to Colorado’s health care professionals has long been one of the Consortium’s missions. In 2021, 3,005 health care providers earned continuing education credits through our online training program, which expanded to add eight new modules covering topics such as pain management, substance use, and the behavioral health needs of farmers and ranchers. Currently, we offer 19 modules.

Our program also expanded its focus. In October, 214 people participated in our virtual symposium about fentanyl and health equity, with an additional 200 people viewing the symposium on-demand. In December, 639 dentists, dental hygienists and oral surgeons attended our new webinar about safe prescribing and pain management.

# Programs and Projects

The Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention helps develop, coordinate, and manage an extensive number of programs intended to fight all aspects of the opioid crisis, as well as train providers and strengthen the prescription drug abuse prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery systems.

These programs require continual collaboration with state and local elected officials, such as the Attorney General, the General Assembly, and County Commissioners across the state. The Consortium also works with state agencies such as the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Other partners include numerous healthcare professionals, community coalitions and grassroots organizations, nonprofits, businesses, academic institutions, and more.

The Consortium's program managers work closely with the coordinating committee and the ten work groups, which help identify the Consortium's priorities and set the scope for projects. Program managers and their respective work group co-chairs are the driving force behind many of the Consortium's most important projects.

Since 2017, the Consortium has been involved in several vital projects and created many important programs.

Examples include:

## Provider Education

Creating the state's leading program to educate physicians, dentists, nurses, and other health care providers about opioid prescribing safety, pain management, and more.

## Medication-Assisted Treatment Expansion Program

Managed eight agencies providing medication for opioid use disorder across 20 counties following \$5 million grant from Legislature

## Recovery Strategic Plan

Coordinated the community outreach used to develop the Statewide Strategic Plan for Substance Use Disorder Recovery: 2020-2025. Nearly 400 Coloradans from 40 counties participated in the drafting process of the strategic plan.

## Safe Medication Disposal

Assisted the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in collecting more than 186,000 pounds of medication through the Take Meds Back program.

## Data Monitoring and Analysis

Work with the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup to monitor substance abuse trends

## Public Awareness

Developed Take Meds Seriously and Bring Naloxone Home public awareness campaigns

# 2021 Major Projects

## Provider Education Work Group

- Hosted virtual symposium dedicated to fentanyl treatment, overdose prevention, and health equity
- Introduced new curriculum for dentists and behavioral health providers in rural communities
- Created 19 online education modules so health care providers can continue to learn at their pace and during the pandemic

## Harm Reduction Work Group

- Developed a toolkit to facilitate connections between law enforcement and community organizations regarding the dissemination of expired naloxone

## Benzodiazepine Action Work Group

- Started work on materials for providers and patients about safe benzodiazepine prescribing

## Recovery Work Group

- Developed and disseminated "Supporting Recovery in Colorado" guide
- Established Recovery Ready Colorado Facebook page to highlight recovery-related stories

## Affected Families and Friends Work Group

- Developed 10 new "Beyond the Numbers" digital stories showcasing personal stories of the impacts of substance use and the opioid crisis

## Treatment Work Group

- Continued information sharing for treatment professionals about innovations in treatment and best practices

## Safe Disposal Work Group

- Helped launch the Colorado Needle Disposal program

## Criminal Justice Work Group

- Created the Criminal Justice Work Group to work more closely with law enforcement on alternatives to incarceration for individuals with an opioid use disorder (OUD) and improved access to treatment for incarcerated individuals with an OUD

## Public Awareness Work Group

- Completed statewide survey research attitudes about the opioid crisis and prescription drug abuse prevention

## Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Work Group

- Continued working to integrate PDMP with electronic health records
- Evaluated risks and benefits of adding diagnostic information to database

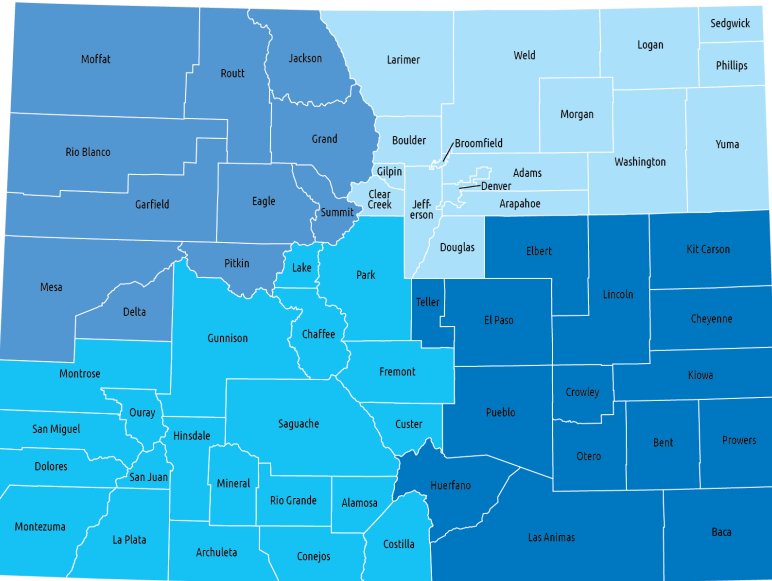


# External Relations

Providing communities with the support and resources they need is one of the Consortium’s most important missions.

Our external relations staff is a vital link to grassroots efforts and provides a wealth of knowledge and technical assistance to communities working on prescription drug abuse prevention. Staff members share knowledge and resources, help develop and implement programs, and ensure people in all Colorado communities have connections with state and national leaders and have access to the latest resources and research.

The external relations team has staff members supporting community members and organizations across the state, whether they are in urban, rural, or frontier communities. Our objective is to share best practices and resources with our local partners and to elevate the voice of local communities to state policymakers and funders.

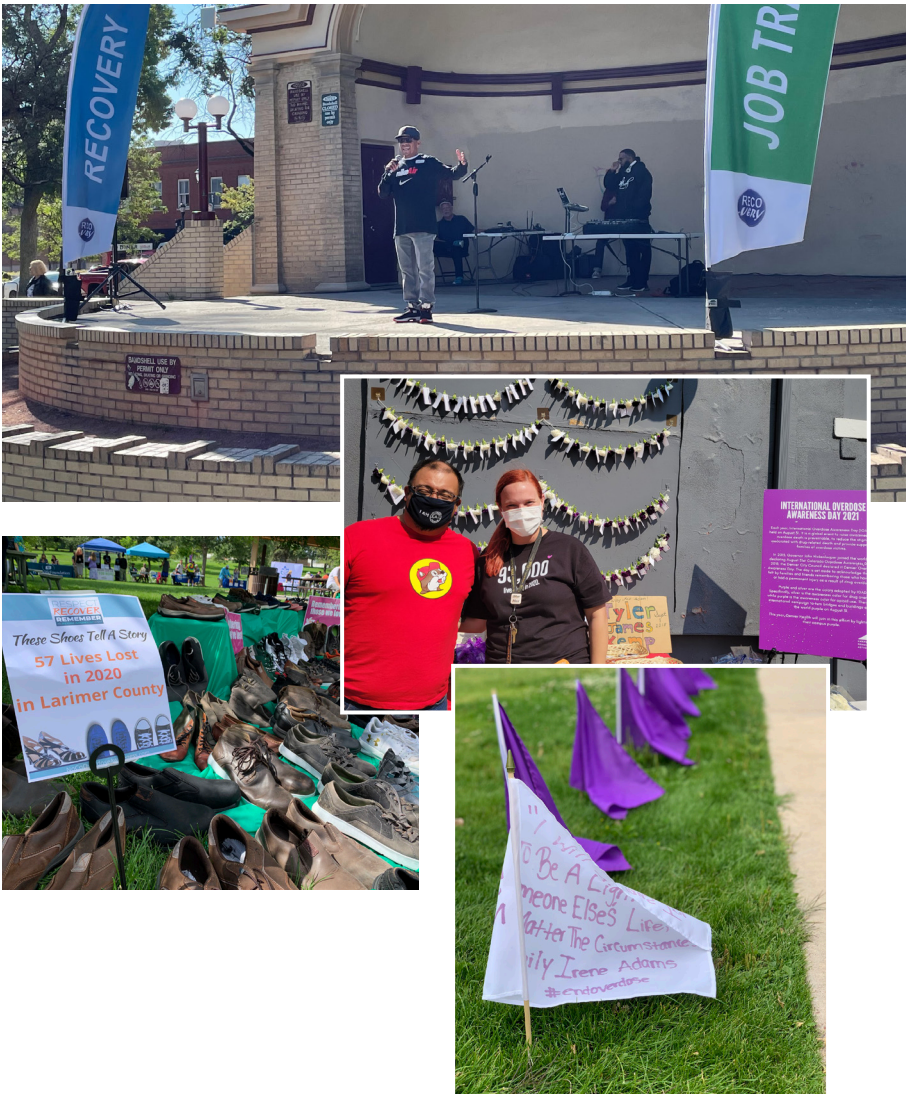


## Since its founding, the Consortium has and continues to:

- Provide timely dissemination of materials, information about funding opportunities, grant writing services, and connections to relevant subject matter experts as needed.
- Educate local stakeholders on policy issues related to substance use disorders and assist them in communicating their challenges and needs to state policy makers.
- Provide technical assistance to community stakeholders and coalitions.
- Provide ongoing support to communities through presentations, naloxone education, communications consultation, facilitating access to local data, and legislative updates

The External Relations Team continues to focus on implicit bias, institutional racism, and barriers to behavioral health equity and disseminate relevant learning on this topic to partners.

◀ **The external relations staff has four members assigned to each quadrant of the state in order to improve assistance based on regional and local needs.**



## The Consortium in the Community

The opioid and overdose epidemics have affected the lives of untold numbers of Coloradans. Every August, people around the state gather to honor those lost to overdoses and promote ways to prevent opioid overdose deaths on International Overdose Awareness Day. In September, we gathered to encourage and celebrate people in recovery as part of National Recovery Month.

Each year, the Consortium supports grassroots events across the state. These photos show tributes created for events in Fort Collins, Glenwood Springs, Denver, and Colorado Springs.

## In 2021, the Consortium’s External Relations Team:

- **Helped create and coordinate the state Behavioral Health Transformational Task Force**, responsible for allocating \$450 million in funds to behavioral health needs in the state.
- **Assisted the Colorado Office of the Attorney General** identify subject matter experts in communities to serve on regional governance boards, participate in strategic planning, and provide an overview of funding sources that could be added to leverage opioid settlement funds.
- **Participated in more than 740 events, meetings, and trainings** that reached thousands of individuals across the state over the fiscal year.
- **Provided technical assistance** to 29 community coalitions and opioid settlement regional boards statewide.
- **Aided communities** in the transition to virtual community engagement due to COVID-19, maintaining contact with more than 50 stakeholders statewide.
- **Collaborated with Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, Colorado Farm Bureau, Colorado Agrability, and Southeast Health Group** to address the unique behavioral health needs of agricultural workers.

# Consortium Funding 2021

The Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention, the community engagement arm of the Center for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention, is able to accomplish its mission with funds from a variety of sources. Below is a summary of funders and activities for 2021. The time period for funding allocations vary.

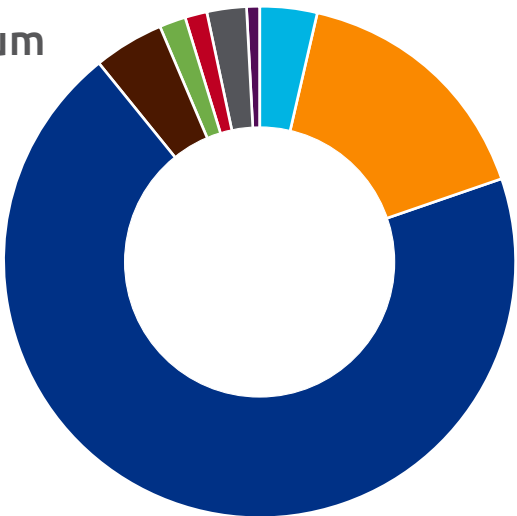
### 2021 FUNDERS



- The Colorado legislature allocated \$600,000 in **HB20-1411** from the federal emergency CARES Act/ Coronavirus Relief Fund for Behavioral Health Services to be used for: (1) education for health care professionals; (2) the grant writing assistance program; and (3) personal protective equipment and telehealth supplies for the MAT Expansion Program agencies. Unspent funds from 2020, \$239,653, were allowed to be carried over and required to be used by December 30, 2021.
- The legislature allocated \$1 million in **Senate Bill 21-137** from the federal American Rescue Plan Act dollars for:
  - Training and education for healthcare, behavioral healthcare, and public healthcare professionals.
  - Further promoting the use of evidence-based models of care for treatment of pain and substance use disorders.
  - Grant writing assistance for non-profit organizations and local public health.
  - Strengthening recovery support programs and services.
- **Senate Bill 21-137** also allocated \$3 million to continue the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) Expansion Program in rural and frontier counties. The program is a collaboration between the Center for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention, CU's College of Nursing, and the Practice Innovation Program at CU's School of Medicine. The program began as pilot in 2017, then was expanded in 2019 with funds from Senate Bill 19-001. The majority of funds were distributed to MAT clinics and providers in 21 counties.

- **Senate Bill 21-137** also allocated \$1,325,000 to the Center for:
  - Continuing education designed to help prescribers of pain medication to safely and effectively manage patients with pain;
  - developing education and training for law enforcement officers and first responders concerning the use of opioid antagonists for opioid overdose and community-based training for persons at risk of opioid overdose;
  - continuation of statewide public awareness campaigns about the safe use, storage, and disposal of opioids and the availability of naloxone ;
  - expansion of the project to gather and analyze data about pregnant women with opioid use disorders and their substance-exposed newborns; and
  - community engagement activities to address substance use prevention, harm reduction, criminal justice system response, treatment, and recovery.
- **The Office of Behavioral Health State Opioid Response** (OBH SOR) funding in the amount of \$274,965 helped the Consortium synchronize the efforts of existing statewide work with the goal of avoiding duplication of activities. This funding also supported the External Relations team to provide technical assistance to community partners addressing prescription drug abuse.
- Under the **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Overdose Data to Action** grant, the Consortium received \$123,084 to provide technical assistance and prevention resources to their grantees and Colorado communities. In partnership with CDPHE's Oral Health Unit, funds were also used to pilot an academic detailing program for dentists, dental hygienists, oral surgeons, and other oral healthcare providers.
- In 2021, the **Colorado Health Foundation's** funds continued to support two recovery-oriented pilot programs in emergency departments as well as evaluation for these pilots. The funds for these pilot programs will end in March 2022.

### Consortium Funding Sources 2021



Funder	Funding period	Amount
Legislature CARES Act HB20-1411	7/1/20-12/31/21	\$239,653
Legislature ARPA SB21-137	7/1/21-6/30/22	\$1,000,000
Legislature SB21-137	7/1/21-6/30/22	\$4,325,000
Office of Behavioral Health State Opioid Response	9/30/21-9/29/22	\$274,965
CDPHE Overdose Data to Action	5/1/21-8/31/21	\$123,084
Colorado Health Foundation	7/1/21-3/31/22	\$78,220
CoBank	7/1/21-6/30/22	\$163,422
Colorado State University	9/30/20-9/29/21	\$40,076
Total		\$6,244,420

- **CoBank's** grant funds focused on developing provider education curricula about a variety of topics, such as pain management, safe opioid prescribing, and motivational interviewing. The funds also supported the provider education trainings in rural and frontier regions of Colorado and the production of video modules for continuing medical education.
- **Colorado State University's Prevention Research Center**, in partnership with the Consortium, CSU Extension and Rise Above Colorado, continued to examine prevention programs to reduce prescription drug misuse in rural communities. While the funding ended in September, the partnership continues.



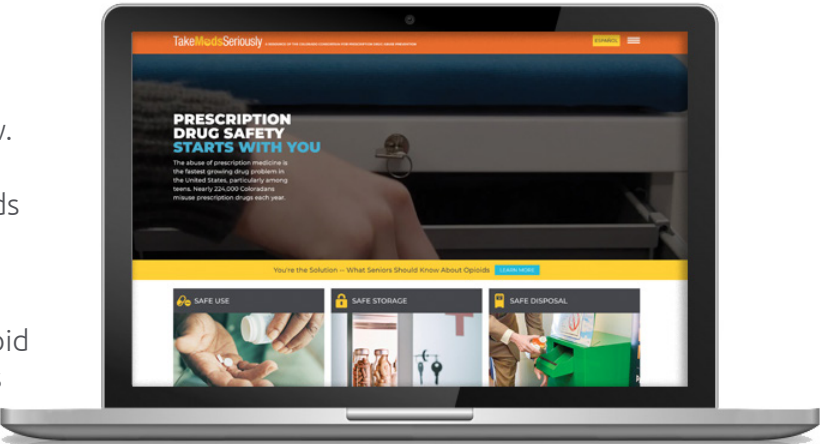
# Public Awareness

The Consortium has developed several public awareness campaigns focused on urgent problems. These campaigns have produced digital assets such as websites and social media posts and out-of-home advertising including billboards and transit ads. There are also materials such as rack cards and brochures that organizations can use for community engagement. Some material is available in Spanish.

## Take Meds Seriously and Take Meds Back

The Consortium’s original public awareness campaign, Take Meds Seriously focuses on the three pillars of medication safety – safe use, safe storage, and safe disposal. In addition to the www. TakeMedsSeriously.org website and digital the campaign developed print assets such as rack cards

Take Meds Seriously also led to Take Meds Back, which promotes Colorado’s medication disposal program, Get Serious, They’re Opioids, about opioid safety, and You’re the Solution, which encourages seniors to follow medication safety practices.



## Bring Naloxone Home

Naloxone is a safe medication that will reverse a potentially fatal opioid overdose. To promote naloxone, the Consortium created the Bring Naloxone Home campaign. It also told people how to spot signs of an opioid overdose, how to use naloxone, and where they could get it.

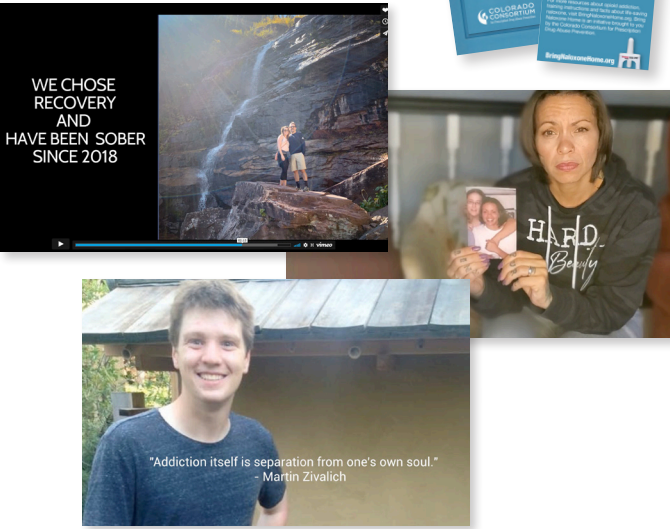
To show support for the campaign, Gov. Jared Polis has declared August to be Naloxone Awareness Month each of the past three years.



## Beyond the Numbers: Echoes of the Opioid Epidemic

While statistics convey the size of the overdose epidemic, they cannot capture emotions. The Affected Families and Friends Work Group created the Beyond the Numbers video storytelling project. Short videos use family picture and narration to tell the first-hand stories of 18 people touched by opioid and other substance use and how their lives have been filled with love, loss, and hope crisis.

The videos are part of a curriculum organizations can use for community engagement.



# Moving Forward

Although Colorado has one of the most well-organized and well-coordinated statewide responses to the opioid crisis, the news about the alarming increase in opioid overdose deaths driven by illicit fentanyl emphasized the urgent need to further ramp up efforts in implementing evidence-based strategies to mitigate the impacts of the opioid crisis in our state.

Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated pandemic responses exacerbated and accelerated the opioid crisis beyond our current efforts. Fortunately, in 2021 the Colorado General Assembly provided additional funds for a variety of response efforts, including dollars for naloxone and funding to continue expansion of medication-assisted treatment, syringe access programs, and recovery support services.

It is critical that we continue our coordinated efforts through partnerships across various disciplines and with partners from communities across the state, as well as with partners of state departments and with state legislators.

Of particular importance is assisting local communities in preparing for the use of forthcoming opioid settlement funds. In this regard, the Consortium is committed to partnering with the Colorado Office of the Attorney General, Colorado Counties, Inc., and local and regional boards and stakeholder in identifying and implementing strategies aimed at addressing specific priority needs. This can include consulting on effective strategies, identifying existing local opioid crisis response efforts that could be further supported, finding additional funding opportunities, and providing connections with subject matter experts.

The 10 work groups of the Consortium will continue to meet with a focus on monitoring and identifying effective strategies for enhancing our statewide response to the persistent opioid crisis. The work groups will also be instrumental in helping to identify strategies and policy recommendations to share with the upcoming legislative Opioid and Other Substance Use Disorders Study Committee, which will convene from July through November 2022. We welcome participation on work groups by any interested individuals.

In Colorado, lives are being saved with naloxone, communicable diseases are being prevented through syringe access programs, unused prescribed controlled substances are being collected and disposed, individuals are accessing medication-assisted treatment across the state, and more people are accessing recovery support services. Still, we must accelerate and further expand our opioid crisis response efforts.

For those who have previously participated actively on the Consortium work groups and those who are current active partners and participants, we are grateful for your time, effort, and dedication to helping to reverse the course of opioid crisis in Colorado.

## José Esquibel

Director, Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention  
Associate Director, Colorado Center for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention







Center for Prescription Drug  
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