

Dane County Exec Parisi: Unveils nearly \$740,000 emergency initiative to address opiate & fentanyl epidemics

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi joined community advocates to announce the Harm Reduction and Prevention Act, a nearly \$740,000 initiative to address opiate and fentanyl related emergencies, as part of his 2023 budget.

“More Dane County residents than ever before are dying of drug poisoning. Just one pill laced with fentanyl or another synthetic opiate can kill our loved ones. We as a community have a responsibility to act. This nearly \$740,000 proposal provides a comprehensive plan to reduce drug poisoning deaths and drug harm in Dane County,” said Executive Joe Parisi. “These investments in my 2023 budget build upon past successes and explore new opportunities to make a potentially lifesaving difference for the individuals and families who call Dane County home.”

Deaths involving opiates and fentanyl have steadily increased in Dane County since 2016. In 2021, 149 people in Dane County passed away due to opiate related overdoses—reflecting 86% of all overdose deaths in the county. Opiate related deaths have increased more than 30% in the past five years. Meanwhile, overdose deaths involving fentanyl are up close to 70% in that same timeframe. Fentanyl was determined to be a contributing factor in over three quarters of the county’s overdose deaths in 2021.

In recognition of the continued scourge of opiates and fentanyl in the Dane County community and the harm they continue to cause families, County Executive Parisi has prepared a \$739,900 initiative to:

- In partnership with Safe Communities and Dane County school districts, pilot developmentally appropriate prevention and harm reduction curriculum through Life Skills and Safety First programming to better serve elementary through high school students. Using an evidence-based approach, Safe Communities will partner with local schools on debuting the new education courses, which focus on building resiliency, identifying risk, being safe, etc. and include interactive modules for older students.
- Increase awareness and community education about the dangers of fentanyl and opiates.
- Partner with community organizations to provide widespread distribution of Narcan and fentanyl test strips.
- Create a dedicated prevention specialist position within the Dane County Department of Emergency Management to oversee the development of a Narcan “leave behind” program where EMS agencies can leave Narcan rescue kits at the scenes of overdoses.
- In partnership with Safe Communities, embed Dane County Recovery Coaches within local hospitals and potentially the Dane County 911 Center to reduce the time between when an overdose occurs and when an individual first makes contact with a professional who can help them begin the path of addiction treatment/recovery.
- Create a prevention coordinator at the OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center to serve as a direct liaison to a number of communities, providing more awareness and prevention services to populations disproportionately impacted by overdoses/fentanyl poisoning.

“According to the CDC, nationally, teen drug overdose deaths rose sharply in 2020, driven by fentanyl-laced pills. In 2021, 77% of all teen overdose deaths involved fentanyl,” said Dan Olson, Monona Grove School District Superintendent. “As a school community, Dane County superintendents are aware of the deadly threat these substances present to our students and families. Thanks to Dane County Executive Parisi for allocating resources to school districts to address this problem.”

This \$739,900 initiative will be in addition to the approximately \$1.6 million Dane County currently allocates in opiate settlement funding for opiate treatment, prevention, and recovery efforts.

“This support comes at a critical time, as we work to reverse a deadly trend both in our community at large and in the Black community. While the deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl, present in everything from counterfeit prescription pills to cocaine,

is an equal opportunity killer, it is taking a disproportionate toll on Black families,” said Carola Gaines, Co-Chair of the African American Opioid Coalition. “According to a Public Health Madison & Dane County report, the overdose death rate is three times higher among Dane County’s Black residents than White.”

As part of the Harm Reduction and Prevention Act, Dane County will invest \$159,900 in media and community outreach efforts. The following groups will receive funding to provide med lock boxes, Narcan, and/or fentanyl test strips: African American Opioid Coalition (\$100,000), Pride in Prevention Coalition (\$50,000), Recovery Coalition of Dane County (\$10,000), Dane County Senior Focal Points (\$15,000), and various housing providers (\$10,000). \$120,000 will also be allocated for school life skills/harm reduction curriculum. These efforts total \$464,900 and a resolution authorizing the emergency use of these funds immediately will be introduced at this evening’s meeting of the Dane County Board of Supervisors.

“I am grateful for the County Executive’s diligence to have been part of the lawsuit against opioid manufacturers,” said Dane County Board Supervisor Rick Rose. “By building out a more vibrant recovery community, we can then focus on treatment and care. Recovery is a journey not a destination. Each day brings something new, so we as a county must remain nimble and vigilant to address those needs through additional funds that will come to our county.”

A second portion of the Dane County Harm Reduction and Prevention Act—totaling just over \$275,000—will be funded in the County Executive’s 2023 budget. Of that, \$115,000 will go to create a Prevention Coordinator position at the OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center. Around \$110,000 will establish a prevention specialist position within the Dane County Department of Emergency Management. This individual will work with local EMS agencies on opiate and fentanyl response initiatives in the coming years. \$10,000 will go to the Narcan “leave behind” program, while an additional \$40,000 will go to school life skills/harm reduction curriculum next year.

“Thanks to Dane County Executive Joe Parisi for his commitment to saving LGBTQ lives,” said Steve Starkey, Executive Director of OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center. “Funds included in the County Executive’s ‘Emergency Harm Reduction and Prevention Act’ will jumpstart a coalition of organizations and businesses that serve Dane County’s LGBTQ community.”

County Executive Parisi's full 2023 budget will be released October 3, 2022.