

Dept. of Health Services: DHS releases findings from statewide listening sessions about opioid settlement funds

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Following a review of public feedback from listening sessions and an online survey in January on the best uses of [funding received through national settlements](#) with opioid distributors and manufacturers, the Department of Health Services (DHS) will begin finalizing its plan to invest the funds to save lives and address Wisconsin's opioid epidemic. DHS held 12 regional listening sessions in early 2022. Nearly 600 people living with an opioid use disorder, their families and friends, and providers of opioid prevention, treatment, and recovery support services participated in these virtual events and nearly 900 comments were submitted through the online survey.

"We listened as hundreds of Wisconsinites explained the profound impact of the opioid epidemic on their families and communities, and we appreciate everyone who took time to share their feedback with us," said DHS Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. "The flexibilities offered by these settlement funds will give us an opportunity to be ever more innovative in our response to the opioid epidemic so we can help people who are currently struggling with an opioid use disorder, as well as work to prevent more individual and community heartbreak over the loss of lives to opioid overdoses."

Over the past several months, DHS also analyzed opioid data and surveillance, reviewed current state and federal funds for opioid use prevention efforts, and met with current grant recipients to prepare for the distribution of the opioid settlement funds.

“The big takeaway from what we heard was that supporting policy and systems change is essential to success,” said DHS Opioids Initiatives Director Paul Krupski. “We also heard that investments are needed across the continuum of care in order for Wisconsin to reduce the dangers of opioids and their impact on our communities. The listening sessions were very successful because we received valuable feedback directly from Wisconsinites about how we can best respond to the opioid epidemic in Wisconsin and use settlement funds.”

Based on the feedback received through the listening sessions and survey, five major themes emerged:

- Address root causes. Address the social determinants of health, including education, income, and housing. Improve access to mental health services. Bolster family stability. Reduce individuals’ exposure of initial trauma and impact of trauma.
- Prevent proactively. Provide evidence-based substance use prevention education, especially in K-12 schools, as well as in communities. Consider including voices of those with lived experience in educational campaigns and community events to reduce stigma in communities.
- Enhance harm reduction. Maintain and expand harm reduction strategies, including needle exchange, safe use sites, increased access and use of naloxone/NARCAN®, and fentanyl test strips.
- Expand treatment options. Increase the accessibility and availability of all forms of treatment that follow best practices. Ensure equity in the location and delivery of treatment options.
- Support recovery. Support individuals in recovery with targeted wraparound services. Provide direct support to families with a loved one with substance use disorder.

Wisconsin is expected to receive funding from four settlements. Two settlements have been finalized. Wisconsin will receive over \$400 million from separate settlements with three opioid distributors (Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen) and opioid manufacturer Johnson & Johnson. The effective date of the settlement with the opioid distributors is April 2, 2022. Wisconsin expects to receive the initial payment this year and payments will continue over 18 years. The effective date of the settlement with Johnson & Johnson is July 1, 2022. Wisconsin expects to receive the initial payment this year and the payments will continue over nine years. Under 2021 Wisconsin Act 57, 30 percent of the payments are allocated to DHS. DHS plans to invest these funds in the areas of prevention, harm reduction,

treatment and recovery, and plans to award funds to communities statewide to implement strategies. The other 70 percent is allocated to communities that joined this litigation. The dollar amount and schedule of the payments is not known at this time. Two other settlements are in process, each with varying and undetermined timelines.

A summary of the feedback received through the listening sessions and survey is available on the [DHS website](#). The site will include information about how the DHS share of the opioid settlements will be distributed when the plans for the funding are in final form.

Earlier this year, DHS, in collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Justice, relaunched the [Dose of Reality](#) initiative to change the conversation about the opioid epidemic in Wisconsin. The new Dose of Reality initiative provides tools for all Wisconsinites to prevent or reduce the risk of opioid use through open and honest talks about the dangers of opioids and ways to save lives.

People interested in learning more about strategies to reduce the impact of substance use in Wisconsin communities are invited to attend the [Opioids, Stimulants, and Trauma Summit, which is scheduled for May 10-12 in La Crosse](#). This annual DHS event brings together experts in the fields of substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery support services from across the country to discuss best practices on building healthy communities.