

Substance Use Response Ecosystem (SURE)
Annual Report 2022



Executive Summary

The Substance Use Response Ecosystem (SURE) is a collective impact modeled coalition working to reduce deaths, hospital utilizations, and drain on community resources related to substance (mis)use in Pueblo. SURE was created in November 2017 to combat effects of the opioid epidemic in Pueblo County and continues to work with the community to address other substance use crises.

Since its formation, SURE has been comprised of work groups called pods, which address the spectrum of substance use from prevention to recovery. Each pod consists of individuals representing various organizations (non-profits, providers, community coalitions, etc.) and community members. Over 20 agencies and organizations are engaged in this collective effort. SURE, works to facilitate collaboration across the ecosystem to align efforts to address substance use in Pueblo. The Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment (PDHPE) serves as the backbone support role of the coalition, tasked with organizing, hosting, and facilitating each monthly meeting, as well as the coordination among members.

This annual report covers major accomplishments and pod highlights for the 2022 year. This year differed than past years for SURE members and accomplishments reflected that change. The creation of the county-wide substance use plan was one of the largest accomplishments for the entire coalition. This plan serves as a guide for community implementation of opioid settlement funds to carry out priorities identified through the planning process. SURE, as well as a formed Decision-Making Board, prioritized strategies for this plan to be utilized through various forms of funding. The annual SURE forum was another major accomplishment for the coalition which included presentations to public attendees, personal recovery stories, naloxone training/distribution, and lockable pill bottles. This was the first in-person forum for the coalition since 2019.

Moving into the new year, SURE has decided to restructure as a coalition to reflect a more coordinated approach among all members carrying out action, networking, and collaborating based on the county-wide substance use plan. This decision dissolves the majority of the previous “pods,” but allows for a wider variety of focus areas. While the pod system will no longer exist, some of the pods including the data pod, the judicial pod, and the peer pod will continue to meet, although no longer required by the coalition. One of the data pod’s goals for the new year is to incorporate more peers within the group and to partner with Southern Colorado Health Network’s newly funded Health Hub.

Major Accomplishments

2022 was a different and exciting year for the SURE coalition. Major accomplishments for the coalition included creation of the county-wide substance use plan, as well as planning and hosting the annual SURE forum.

County-Wide Substance Use Plan

The majority of SURE’s work this year was the creation of the county-wide substance use plan. Creating a county-wide substance use plan was agreed upon in late 2021, after being made aware that national opioid settlements would start being distributed to states. With settlements and increasing funding opportunities to be available moving into 2023, it was decided that the community should collectively identify how current resources could be sustained or enhanced through these funds.

The planning process started with the development of key tools and foundations for the group. The first tool involved was a process journey map which organized the phases of the planning process. The journey map showcased a timeline for 2022 for member understanding of the process and to make sure this timeline was adhered to. SURE would refer to this map throughout the year. Ground rules were also developed that outlined expectations throughout the process.

To clearly communicate what the planning process aimed to achieve, SURE finalized the following goal statement:

After seven meetings, SURE and additional planning partners will have produced a county-wide substance use plan that will be utilized to strategically guide allocation and/or application for substance use related funds (opioid settlements, grants, etc.) towards feasible, evidence-based implementations for Pueblo County. This plan will outline programs and implementations according to five topic areas of focus: prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and criminal justice.

To create a bigger picture of the potential impact this plan could have on Pueblo County, a results statement was also created:

Everyone in Pueblo County has access to substance use related knowledge, resources, support, and feels safe discussing substance use.

Creation of the county-wide substance use plan would allow the group to achieve the goal statement created, and in turn meeting the goal statement would work towards achieving the results statement that the group crafted.

Data was also a critical tool for SURE during this process. PDPHE's Public Health Epidemiologist presented relevant data to the group on each substance use category (prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and criminal justice) that would be brainstormed. Fortunately, PDPHE had access to partner data related to substance use due to funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. This funding enabled PDPHE to establish data sharing agreements with public safety partners, behavioral health providers, local hospitals, local harm reduction agencies, school districts, and the Department of Human Services. Internal dashboards and a publicly available [Substance Use Data Dashboard were also created](#).

The coalition then began the brainstorming portion of this process. Utilizing Zoom breakout rooms, brainstorming sessions took place where members discussed potential interventions and implementations, target populations, organizations who were doing or could do the work, and required resources for each of the major substance use categories. Brainstormed ideas were refined and expanded upon to determine the evidence-base for each strategy.

To close out the process for SURE, the members were asked to review all refined ideas and prioritize based on three areas of criteria: feasibility, impact, and effort. Ideas from each category were separately presented. Alongside the presentation of the information, each member participated in a digital survey for the category and were asked to rank each idea based on the three areas of criteria. Ideas were ranked on a scale of 1 (least feasible, least impactful, most effort) to 4 (most feasible, most impactful, least effort) and members had the option to leave additional comments on the idea.

While SURE was still brainstorming and prioritizing, PDPHE was recruiting members to serve on the Decision-Making Board for the county-wide plan. The Opioid Settlement MOU from the Colorado Office of the Attorney General (COAG), outlined recommended guidance for composition of a single-county board. Outreach to individuals from public safety, the Health Department, the Department of Human Services, Pueblo City Council, the Board of County Commissioners, and the Office of the Mayor was done in order to form this decision-making board. These members would follow the recommendation from the COAG and bring community leader perspectives to the table who stood to receive little, if any money from settlements.

The members of the Decision-Making Board include the following members and entities:

Mayor Gradisar – Office of the Mayor
President Graham – Pueblo City Council
Commissioner Ortiz – Board of County Commissioners
District Attorney Chostner – District Attorney's Office

Director Evetts – Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment
Director Torres – Department of Human Services
Chief Noeller – Pueblo Police Department
Sheriff Lucero – Pueblo County Sheriff’s Office
Chief Huber – Pueblo Fire Department

The Decision-Making Board was asked to complete a final round of prioritizing the results of which would be the final priorities included in the county-wide substance use plan. The Decision-Making Board reviewed all ideas from the categories of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and criminal justice that SURE had developed, along with the prioritization scores the SURE had given each. The final priorities for each category are as follows:

Treatment

- Crisis Triage Center
- De-fragmentation of healthcare
- Youth inpatient services
- Childcare for parents seeking substance use treatment

Criminal Justice

- Medical Assisted Treatment/Medication for Opioid Use Disorder expansion in the jail
- JBBS expansion
- Co-responder program

Prevention

- Life skills curriculum in schools
- Prosocial opportunities
- Family support and education
- Youth mental health services
- Icelandic model for primary prevention

Harm Reduction

- Naloxone disbursement
- Public sharps containers
- Fentanyl testing

Recovery

- Peer program
- Recovery housing
- Employment services
- Recovery friendly workplaces

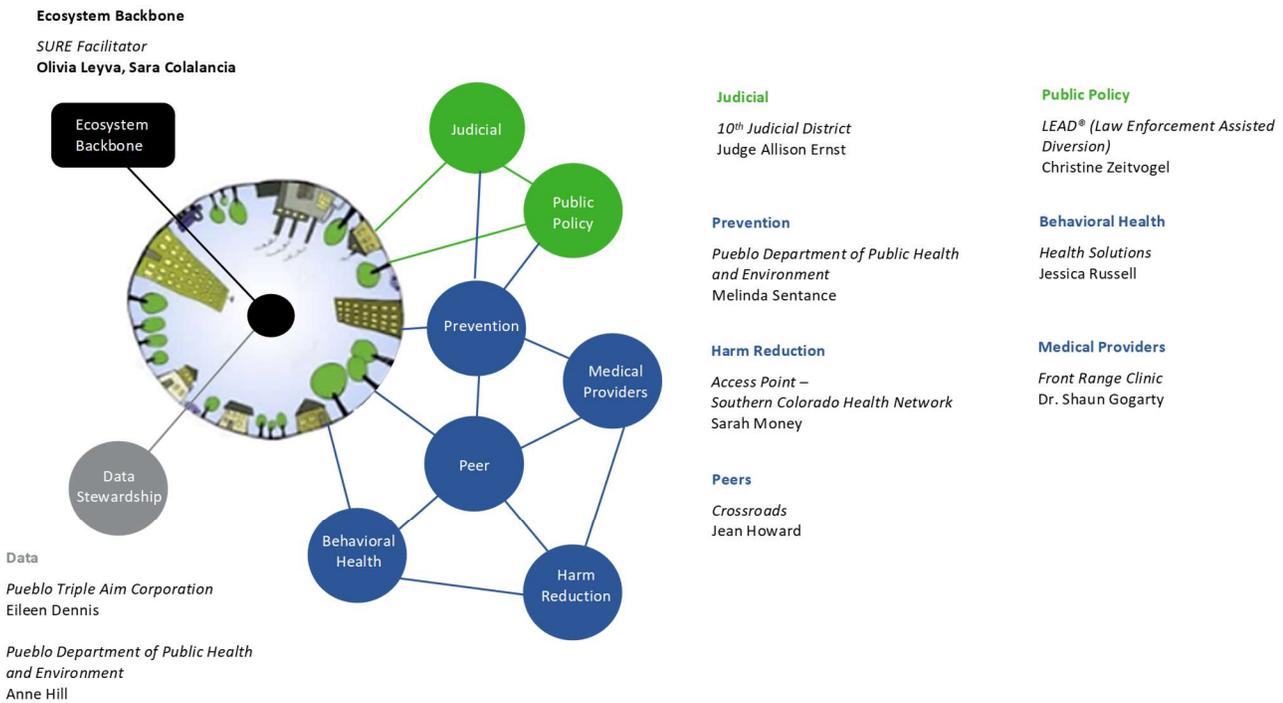
With these final priorities established, PDPHE is creating the formal document outlining the process and priorities. This plan will be used to guide SURE in identifying areas of focus as the coalition looks to restructure, as well as helping the group strategically seek out and help agencies and organizations in Pueblo County apply for settlement funds and substance use-related grants that align with the plan.

SURE Forum

The annual SURE forum is a public event, hosted every year by SURE and its partners. The prevention pod led the planning and organization efforts of the forum this year. After two years of being held virtually, this event was hosted virtually and in-person at PDPHE on October 20th. The event had a total of 49 in-person attendees and, as of mid-November 2021, had been virtually viewed 486 times.

Jean Howard, peer pod facilitator, presented information about fentanyl. Melinda Sentence, prevention pod facilitator, hosted a panel of individuals in recovery, talking about their experiences and recovery journeys. Alexis Rael, from

Southern Colorado Harm Reduction Association (SCHRA), provided attendees with naloxone training. Representatives from Health Solutions, Crossroads' Turning Points, Pueblo Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), the Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention, Front Range Clinic, Health Colorado, the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Pueblo County, SCHRA, and Southern Colorado Health Network – Access Point Pueblo all provided organizational information throughout the event. Attendees also took home free naloxone, safe storage pill bottles, and rapid at home COVID-19 tests.



This diagram depicts the SURE pod system that has existed over the years. The information listed provides an indication of the pod facilitator(s).

Pod Highlights

Data

The Data Pod benefitted from receiving a grant in December 2021, awarded by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). Implementation of this grant began this year. The Data Pod partnered with mentors from the New York City Health Department Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use Prevention, Care and Treatment to enhance data and health equity, related to improvements in the substance use dashboard. The Data Pod was instrumental in reviewing the first iterations of the dashboard with the intention of improving usability, accessibility, and interactivity. The New York City Health Department also assisted the Data Pod with the creation of a new data brief, thinking through important concepts such as Institutional Review Board (IRB), and a Community Advisory Board (CAB).

The improved [Substance Use Data Dashboard](#) is currently available on the PDPHE data page. The creation of this dashboard was a major accomplishment for the Data Pod. The Data Pod also decided over the year, to collect narratives from important figures in the community to host on the dashboard and to provide more context to the data being shared with the community.

Throughout 2022, the Data Pod also created a data brief and fact sheets. The first brief and fact sheet are scheduled to go out before the end of 2022. The Data Pod plans to develop and disseminate these products around two to three times per year on topics based on the data collected.

Lastly, the Data Pod plans to include one individual (or more) with lived experience and/or community member perspective in the group. Conversations on the potential of this participation took place at the start of the year and the request for individuals with lived experience to join the Data Pod has occurred.

Harm Reduction

Access Point partnered with PDPHE to provide naloxone trainings to community providers. Even with the capacity of organizations as a challenge, five organizations were trained during the year. Support from the Harm Reduction Pod was given to the Peer Pod with the Recovery Safe Zone booth at this year's State Fair. Harm reduction workers covered shifts at this booth during Overdose Awareness Day. Naloxone was distributed at the fair, for a total of 200 doses provided.

Access Point has tracked 2600 different individuals accessing supplies for this year. Over 9,000 fentanyl test strips were distributed as well as 13,000 doses of naloxone. It has been reported that 477 overdose reversals occurred this year.

In August, Access Point Pueblo was awarded funding to start a health hub for people who use drugs in Pueblo. The scope of this project is to work with existing community providers and organizations to streamline the linkage to care for individuals who use drugs. SURE members have been utilized by the new health hub to establish a provider list and are eager to collaborate in this project.

Peer

Over the course of the year, the Peer Pod accomplished both of their set objectives. The first objective was to put together a [Peer Support Database](#), providing information on peers from multiple agencies on PDPHE's website. Listed in the Peer Support Database are different peers in the community and the agencies they work for. A picture of each peer is included alongside a biography. The intention of the webpage is to create a one-stop site that allows individuals in Pueblo seeking peer services to find and reach out to a peer that meets their recovery journey needs. There are plans to continue to grow this portion of the website over the next year, updating and adding peers as they continue to connect with the Peer Pod.

The second objective was to plan and host a Yellow Sober, Recovery Safe Zone booth at the 2022 Colorado State Fair. The Peer Pod was able to have coverage from a variety of peers and partner agencies and organizations for the entire duration, ten days in total, of the fair. Not only was the booth a sober space for individuals in recovery, but it also provided information on substance use services in Pueblo. The booth was such a success that the Peer Pod plans to be at the fair in 2023.

Prevention

This year, the Prevention Pod worked to successfully plan, organize, and host the annual SURE Forum. The forum took place October 20 and aimed to specifically target parents and youth, while still being open to interested general community members. The SURE forum was organized according to the following purpose statement:

To educate the Pueblo community about fentanyl, provide naloxone training, and reduce stigma regarding substance use disorders.

The event featured a representative from Crossroads Turning Point who provided education about the danger of fentanyl, the myths associated with the drug, and a peer support specialist from Southern Colorado Harm Reduction Association who provided naloxone training. Four speakers from the [Your Words Have Power](#) campaign shared their recovery stories, aiming to reduce the stigma about substance use disorders.

Participation in the event included 49 physical attendees and viewers of the Facebook Live. As of 11/15/2022 a total of 486 viewers watched the event. Additional successes of the event included distribution of COVID-19 tests, Narcan kits, and safe medication lockable pill bottles.

Additionally, the Prevention Pod is currently focusing on naloxone distribution and training. Apart from distributing naloxone to community members, restaurants and bars are the current target audience to receive naloxone training.

Public Policy

The Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD®) Program has been implemented within a harm reduction framework. Implementation of this program will continue into the next year.

Pueblo County has also been represented on the Southeast Colorado Opioid Response Settlement Region (SECOR) regional council. This Region 19 Board will continue to meet in regard to opioid settlement distribution and updates on this process.

Plans for 2023

SURE Vision

After the county-wide substance use plan was finished, the coalition collectively discussed how the group would look in 2023. To describe to both the public and new members to the group, it was decided to adopt a formal vision statement identifying what the coalition aims to achieve. The following result statement from the substance use planning process was adopted as the formal vision statement:

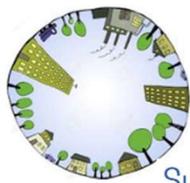
Everyone in Pueblo County has access to substance use related knowledge, resources, and support and feels safe discussing substance use.

To work towards achieving this vision, the SURE coalition plans to focus on the final priorities identified through the county-wide substance use plan. SURE has decided to restructure to reflect a more coordinated approach among all members, focused on carrying out action, networking, and collaborating based on the county-wide substance use plan. This decision dissolves the previous pod system and allows for more organized areas of focus.

As mentioned, plans have also been made to incorporate peers within [the Data Pod](#) to ensure that the data dashboard is not perpetuating harmful ideas about people who use drugs and instead is telling a more accurate story of substance use in the community.

SURE is also excited to partner with Southern Colorado Health Network's newly funded Health Hub. This partnership allows more resources to be tapped into, as well as providing another avenue for community substance use priorities to be addressed.

Lastly, strategically seeking out and helping partner agencies and organizations apply for funding opportunities to resources related to the substance use plan is another focus for 2023. Creating connectedness among funding within the coalition will enable Pueblo County to enhance current substance use resources and carry out prioritized strategies in the categories of treatment, criminal justice, prevention, harm reduction, and recovery.



SURE

Substance Use Response Ecosystem

county.pueblo.org/public-health/SURE

Ecosystem Backbone

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