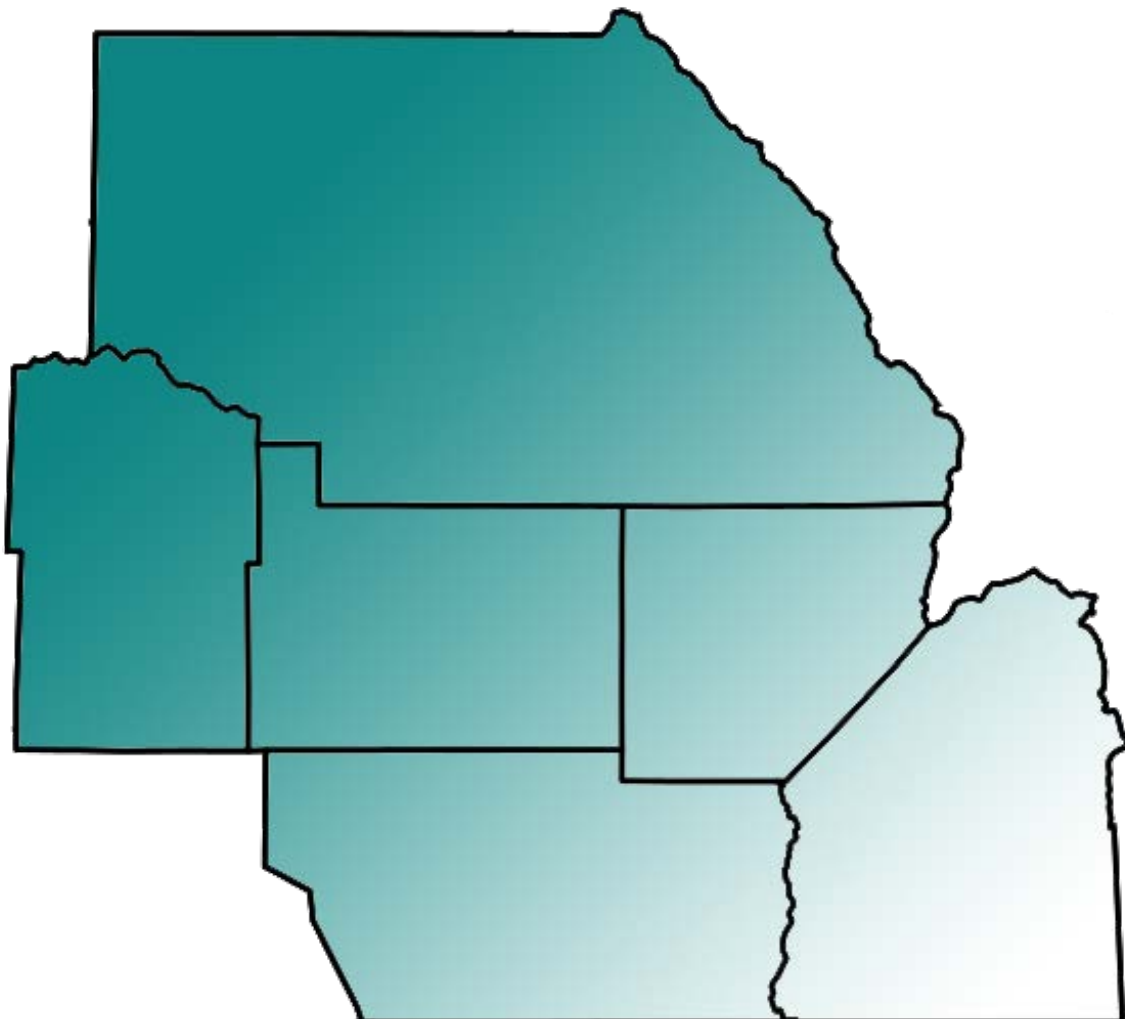




COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER
SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR COLORADO NONPROFITS

RURAL EXPERIENCE

Opioid Crisis in the San Luis Valley Summary Report



Purpose

At Community Resource Center, we believe in the power of the nonprofit sector to affect change and support thriving communities. This begins with convening diverse stakeholders throughout the nonprofit ecosystem – nonprofit leaders, volunteers, foundations, government agencies, public servants, and businesses – to tackle complex issues and deepen the impact of the sector.

With that landscape in mind, CRC is committed to convening rural communities and statewide resource providers to discuss these complex issues through our Rural Experience programming. We acknowledge that opioid misuse and behavioral health are well-documented as key issues facing our state, and specifically in the San Luis Valley. With the highest overdose rates in Colorado, opioid misuse is a prevalent issue in the community. We believe that by leveraging expertise in the room, locally-driven initiatives, and fierce commitment to community, these convenings can catalyze change.

On November 2-3, CRC convened a group of diverse stakeholders to discuss the opioid crisis in the San Luis Valley. Local community organizers, nonprofit leaders, and statewide partners informed outreach and planning efforts to ensure a thoughtful and robust dialogue that would leverage existing programs and initiatives in the region.

Who participated? We intentionally engaged professionals from diverse focus areas, not just healthcare, to be part of the conversation. Nearly 100 individuals participated in the two day event, including local law enforcement, teachers, nonprofit and healthcare professionals, elected officials, statewide funders, and local residents. A full list of participants is included as Appendix B.

Where did we go? The first day of the event was hosted in Alamosa where we focused on cross sector dialogues and stories of those impacted by opioids. On the second day, participants visited San Luis to collectively identify priorities and consider locally-driven solutions.

What did we do? CRC leveraged existing relationships, both regionally and statewide, to facilitate an event that would focus on resources for, and solutions to, the problem of opioid abuse. This model uses community input to focus on a solutions-driven conversation. The agenda (Appendix A) brought speakers and experts to the Valley to provide a holistic view of opioid misuse from diverse perspectives. We invited statewide leaders, such as the Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse and the Office of Behavioral Health, as well as local groups moving forward high quality programs and established collaborative initiatives. Additionally, we invited speakers who shared powerful stories on their personal experiences with addiction and what resources they used (or couldn't access) to support their families. In addition to guest speakers and panelists, participants engaged in small group and large group facilitated dialogue and activities to create clear, community-driven priorities, short term action steps, and identify service gaps.



Regional Themes

Practitioners, experts, residents, and statewide stakeholders participated in two activities that identified and prioritized key issues within substance use and abuse in the region, while also highlighting potential solutions. These facilitated small group and large group conversations provided a space to share ideas, concerns, and available resources. Five key priorities and their accompanying solutions emerged.

Trained Providers: A great deal of discussion centered on the need for more trained providers in the Valley. Trained providers are needed for both immediate treatment and recovery. Participants and local experts voiced how emergency treatment options have expanded in the last few years, but gaps remain in standardized training for administering lifesaving drugs such as naloxone. We also heard that more providers offering recovery treatment options is essential, as each provider and treatment center in the region is at full capacity for most of the year and patients face significant waiting lists.

Rural Experience Solutions: There are currently a number of programs working to expand access and administration of life saving drugs. IT MATTTs Colorado is training primary care providers in medication-assisted treatment (MAT) practices. In partnership with High Plains Research Network, IT MATTTs Colorado is working to research areas most effected by opioid use and train providers to identify, screen, treat, and collaborate with statewide entities to better combat the crisis in rural Colorado. Additional efforts by state entities, such as the Office of Behavioral Health, will assist in overall training and distribution of medication. These groups are working on ways to increase treatment options by adding crisis hotlines and mobile apps where users can report medical emergencies without the fear of incarceration. Furthermore, different training courses will expand treatment access for those in recovery, and give current recovery facilities larger staff and more resources, such as 10,000 Naloxone kits.

Quick Wins – Next 30 Days:

- Coordinate provider schedules for proper MAT training.
- Explore other available resources in Colorado and connect with high-impact programs.
- Talk to community members, not just from the healthcare sector, to spread further awareness and begin the larger process of de-stigmatizing the opioid problem.

Access to Resources: Many resources available to residents of the San Luis Valley are located in Alamosa. Residents from other counties travel long distances to access any addiction treatment option, but many do not have the resources to do so on a regular basis. Participants felt opioid abuse affected the entire Valley and that resources should be better dispersed and readily available to make a meaningful impact.

Rural Experience Solutions: Participants voiced that expanded local outreach efforts coupled with new healthcare facilities in currently underserved areas would help to address current access problems. Intentional outreach to highly affected communities should focus on showing what options for help are closest to them. The recent Colorado Department of Public Health



and Environment effort to add more medication drop boxes and take back locations in every county will help individuals who currently have no safe way of disposing opioids. Healing Hearts Therapeutic Center is working to establish a 70,000 square foot rehab center to assist underserved areas. The organization plans to have a 74 day treatment program with education for health professionals, job training opportunities for underserved regions, and an education center to support families of clients.

Quick Wins – Next 30 Days:

- Visit existing healthcare facilities, both urban and rural, and examine the state of facilities and analyze opportunities and gaps in service.
- Leverage existing partnerships with health insurance providers to get a realistic view of what is currently being done for those living in poverty.
- Use hospital partnerships to advocate for greater holistic care which includes medical and psychological treatment.

Serving the Whole Family: When discussing opioid misuse, the conversation often focuses on those experiencing addiction or in recovery, with less focus on the effects on the family unit. Many family members struggle, both financially and emotionally, when watching their loved ones deal with opioid abuse. Specifically, children need more emotional support when a parent is experiencing addiction. Schools and grandparents are often expected to fill in the gap and provide support, but many not have the capacity, expertise, or financial support to do so.

Rural Experience Solutions: More resources are needed to provide support for family members. Increased emphasis on emotional and mental health would benefit family members, including social workers who can work flexibly with families over sustained periods of time. More counselors in schools are needed to assist children dealing with the emotional trauma they may have experienced from a young age. Participants discussed some support groups for families in the community, but there were clear knowledge gaps about free options. The support of other families who have experienced the impact of addition is essential so that they can build a network of peers to rely on and share resources.

Quick Wins – Next 30 Days:

- Ensure resource pamphlets and knowledge are distributed to the youth at social gathering areas, such as schools and churches.
- Confirm there is active outreach to families, not just crisis areas/hospitals.
- Promote an education forum in January 2018 in Saguache, Antonito, and San Luis.
- Promote regional efforts in local media.
- Involve youth in recruitment efforts to spread awareness of the issue.
- Check-in with current coalitions to ensure that they are coordinating rather than competing.
 - See if community-wide information sharing is possible and what networks currently exist to maintain that framework.
- Raise awareness of whole family services and the difficulties that family members go through in relation to the opioid crisis.
- Invite leaders from regional, state, federal agencies to local events to increase awareness and incorporate them into solution building.

Breaking Down Stigma: Many communities work to overcome the significant stigma associated with addiction and drug abuse. Many in the Valley assume there are few available recovery options, in addition to fearing stigma in a small-town environment. The acceptance of addiction as a behavioral health issue that can be treated has made some progress in breaking down stigma, but the opioid crisis is somewhat unique in that many individuals of various walks of life are affected. While a widespread issue, individuals are fearful of the social consequences of discussing their own substance abuse experiences.

Rural Experience Solutions: Participants felt youth education was one of the most effective ways to deal with the stigma associated with opioid abuse. Children should be educated from a young age about the harmful effects of opioid abuse, and what resources are available to them in their communities. Communities that Care (CTC) has started a program for youth recognition and empowerment to help fight the prevalence of opioid abuse. CTC operates in the majority of the San Luis Valley and is working with students to research resources in the region while also lifting up the stories of how those students spread information back to their communities. Costilla County CTC's youth group was engaged in the second day of the convening, and contributed to developing solutions and action steps.

Impact and Next Steps

The Rural Experience connected diverse regional and statewide professionals and community leaders. Participants were able to discuss the expansive impact of opioid misuse on families and the community. The knowledge gained and relationships built during the Rural Experience contributed to the ongoing process of combatting the opioid crisis. The final solutions-focused small group discussed opportunities for intentional, cross-sector collaboration to address the issue.



Quick Wins – Next 30 Days:

- Identify which assets are willing to join forces and come together for regional coalition.
 - Create a continuum of providers and services, representing each county in the Valley, that deal with prevention, intervention, and recovery.
 - Work towards creating a website for resources with links to other organizations.
- Look to the SLV Prevention Coalition as they begin to address their participation and role with current prevention efforts.
- Emulate Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention model with multiple working groups that meet as a single entity but have their own specific tasks.
- Work with the Community Resource Center to coordinate local efforts and look to placing AmeriCorps VISTA member(s) to help move projects forward.

CRC will follow up with participants to gauge how the community has responded to opioid abuse since the Rural Experience. We look forward to engaging with the community and supporting next steps and regional efforts driven by local agencies and community members.

Appendices:

Appendix A. Rural Experience Itinerary

Thursday, November 2

River of Life Assembly of God
2602 Clark St, Alamosa, CO 81101

8:30 – 10:00 AM: Welcome & Opening Session

Presentation on Statewide Needs Assessment: Cristen Bates, Director of Policy, Communications, and Strategy, Office of Behavioral Health

Conversation with Dr. Barbara Troy, Valley-Wide Health Systems

10:15 – 11:45 AM: Community Impact: A Cross-Sector Dialogue on Substance Use & Abuse

Facilitated by Maria Fabula, President & CEO, Community Resource Center

Panelists Include:

- Lance Cheslock, Executive Director, La Puente Home
- Heather Brooks, City Manager, City of Alamosa
- Kristina Daniel, Alamosa City Councilor, Vice President for Program Development, Advantage Treatment Center
- Charlotte LeDonne, Nurse Coordinator, San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center

11:45 – 12:30 PM: Lunch

12:30 – 1:00 PM: Root Causes of Substance Abuse & Social Issues

Marianna King, Professor, Colorado State University – Pueblo

1:00 – 1:30 PM: Stories of Impact & Resiliency

- Amari, Rise Above Colorado Teen Council Member
- Amarah Raullerson & Vicki White, Hope for Kids Like Me
- Bernadette Cisneros, Valley-Wide Health Systems

1:45 – 4:00 PM: Interactive Learning Session

Facilitated by Kory Thomas, Assistant Director, ECHO Colorado

5:00 – 6:30 PM: Networking Reception

Bistro Rialto 716 Main St, Alamosa 81101

Friday, November 3

Travel to San Luis, Colorado (about 45 minutes southeast of Alamosa)

Centennial High School
14644 CO-159, San Luis 81152

9:00 – 10:30 AM: Highlighting Locally Driven Solutions & Opportunities

- Hope for Kids Like Me – Vicki White
- Ascension Counseling – Sandra Goodwin & Creed de Avanzar
- Communities That Care & Costilla County Prevention Coalition – Lisa Casias & Amber Maestas
- IT MATTRs Colorado – Reginaldo Garcia
- Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention – Jessica Eaddy

10:45 – 12:15 PM: Solutions Town Hall

Facilitated by Maria Fabula, President & CEO, Community Resource Center

The Solutions Town Hall brings together local nonprofits and service providers, community leaders, funders, and issue stakeholders for an energizing, collaborative, and solutions-focused conversation. Participants will leave feeling motivated, ready to establish new partnerships and continue making high impact change in their communities.

12:15 – 1:00 PM: Wrap Up & Lunch

Appendix B. Session Attendees

Full Name	Email Address	Company	Title
Andrews, Donna	andrewsd@vwhs.org	Valley-Wide Health Systems	Grants & Special Projects Coordinator
Apodaca, Miroslava	miroslava.apodaca@state.co.us	Costilla County DHS	Caseworker Supervisor
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Bates, Cristen	cristen.bates@state.co.us	Colorado Office of Behavioral Health	Director of Policy, Communications, and Strategy
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Brown, Emily	ebrown@riograndecounty.org	Rio Grande County Public Health Agency	Director
Casias, Lisa	lcasias@costillacounty-co.gov	Costilla County Public Health Agency	Prevention Coordinator
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Fabula, Maria	fabula@crcamerica.org	Community Resource Center	President & CEO
Felmlee, Brenda	brenda.felmlee@mail.house.gov	Rep. Scott Tipton, CO-3	SLV Regional Field Representative
Fox, Danny	TheRollingChurch@gmail.com	The Rolling Church Ministry	Co-Pastor/Co-Founder
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Garcia-Kuhns, Gail	gailg@slvbhg.org	San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group	Prevention Specialist
Goodwin, Sandra	sandragoodwin_ascensioncounseling@outlook.com	Ascension Counseling & Transformation	Associate Director / Owner
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Gurule, Bill	bill.gurule@judicial.state.co.us	12th Judicial District	Chief Probation Officer

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