

Substance Use in Itasca

Supports and Barriers to Recovery - Fall 2020

Itasca is a resilient county with a strong sense of community. Geographic isolation breeds community collaboration. Small range towns, a summer tourist boom, and vacation properties characterize the area. Substance use is a crisis that public health and university collaborations are working tirelessly to address.

Geographic and economic barriers to recovery

The intersection of two state highways in Itasca create a crossroads for drug distribution. Meth, heroin, and prescription opioid access have grown, as well as Gabapentin abuse.

Time and resources

- Funding was cut years ago for drug law enforcement, blocking the prospect for drug specialists
- Treatment and social service workers are limited by funding and time constraints
- Patients from outside areas put a burden on county resources
- There is/are:
 - competition for resources between established treatment centers and new organizations
 - hesitancy from the county to publicly fund substance prevention
 - limited treatment, sober, and low incomes housing options
- decreased legal consequences for drug offenses (point of contention for law enforcement)

Needs

- Long term outpatient coordination
- Funding for voluntary programs
- Medication-Assisted Therapy (MAT) providers (the closest are in Bemidji and Duluth)
- Safety measures for public workers
- Foster homes for CPS removals
- Youth inpatient treatment
- Reliable transportation
- Employment opportunities for those with a criminal record

Education, prevention, and accountability

Community education topics:

- Addiction as a chronic illness
- How to access resources
- Enabling, codependency, self-care
- Stigma, harm reduction, syringe access
- Medication assisted therapy (MAT)
- Mental health, suicidal ideation, vaping
- Drug identification, signs and symptoms
- Therapeutic intervention for Law Enforcement
- "In Plain Sight" workshops
- MAT for health care providers

Address risk factors upstream

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and historical trauma training
- Mending Broken Hearts & Healing through History
- (native trauma training)
- Annual mental health "check ups"
- Establish alternative pain treatments
- Preventative programs in Itasca County:
 - The Positive Norms Campaign, STEP program and Rapids Rising (alcohol)
- Need a "Rapids Rising" program for drug use
- React to drug use before "rock bottom"

Host 3-4 community forums per year

Naloxone/Narcan training saves lives from opioid overdose

- Not all public departments are trained in naloxone
 - Naloxone training and availability remains a point of contention for law enforcement

- UMN teams are scheduling virtual training with some first responders and willing to train anyone who is interested (contact information at end of article)
- All Itasca school districts are moving forward with a naloxone protocol

Family, friends, and other social support

- Sober Squad has a big recovery presence
- Close-knit communities are willing to help each other out
- Need support groups and methamphetamine drug campaigns
- Invest early in youth with familial drug exposure
- Address substance use as a family disease
 - Family support staff critical
 - Engage families to end generational cycles
 - Koochaching Co & Kootasca Community Action
 - Parental substance use contributes to school absences
- Parents with children struggling need support
 - Engage with other parents

Recovery supports

- Sober Squad
- Lake Place
- Northland Recovery
- Lakeview Behavioral Health
- Hope House
- Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous
- New Leaf
- Ross Resources
- Rural Aids Action Network (RAAN - Harm Reduction Services)

Cultural considerations

- Leech Lake Band of the Ojibwe brings a rich culture to Itasca
- Historical trauma from racism and oppression play a role in substance use
- Cultural and trauma training is helpful
 - Mending Broken Hearts
 - Healing Through History
- Opioid access on reservations is a concern
- Sober Squad has a positive impact on native recovery and substance use

Use in youth

- Cannabis and vaping is increasing
- Meth, cocaine, and prescription opioids are common
- Increased classroom behaviors
- 10-20% use substances (Deer River)
 - Permissive culture of alcohol

Community Culture

- Domestic, sexual, and chemical abuse often occur together
- "Meth is king," but opioids are growing
- Modern drug combinations are deadly and overdoses are increasing
- "Out of sight, out of mind" is a systemic ideology around substances
- There is collaborative culture in public services
- MAT, harm reduction, and naloxone are contentious topics
- The community is very loyal to each other
- There is an expectation of "no pain" in medical practice that leads to opioid prescriptions
- There is a need for alternative pain therapies

Community resources and needs

There are many community resources for substance use, mental health, homelessness, and poverty. AA meetings occur daily, and events such as the Children's Fair, National Night Out, and NAMI programs are present. Alternatively, some local parks are avoided due to drug use and needles, and security has been bolstered at local hospitals due to incidents of violence secondary to substance use

Needs

- Immediate resources to people in or exiting jail
- Transparency between public services
- Community centers and transportation to non-substance involving activities
- Long term treatment centers
- MAT provider
- Sober living
- Wellness court
- An outlet for youth to share experiences

Contact **Kelly Chandler** (kelly.chandler@co.itasca.mn.us) for information, resources or naloxone training.

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This project is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, under award number 1H79T108900-01.



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