

Substance Use in North St. Louis County

Supports and Barriers to Recovery - Fall 2020

Ely

Ely has a rich outdoor culture and collaborative community. Despite this, there are high rates of substance abuse, poverty, and a noticeable wealth disparity. Many individuals are seeking health insurance, housing, and basic determinants of health. Providing these would help many substance issues. Stigma of mental health and substance use is also a problem, but proposals for treatment centers in Ely have been denied. Treatment services and Peer Recovery Support (PRS) are needed, as well as improved follow-through of treatment resources. Some laws are barriers to treatment, as it is difficult to find spaces for Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors (LADCs) and treatment services that meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Substance Use Disorder (SUD) education is needed, as well as supportive training to professionals and job opportunities for those with criminal records. Workshops that would be helpful include SBIRT, Medication Assisted Therapy (MAT), vaping, naloxone/Narcan, QPR, WRAP, NAMI, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and stigma. For law enforcement and first responders: stigma, de-escalation, MHFA, and Substance Use Disorders (SUDs).

Law enforcement has recently enacted change to address uniformed attitudes in the department. Common substances at schools are tobacco (vaping), cannabis, and alcohol. Vaping education is important. In addition to these, meth is seen in the community; some made and sold nearby. Despite the presence of illegal substances, community members assert that alcohol and tobacco cause most deaths in the area and that alcohol poses the biggest issue, as cultural acceptability is a barrier. Geriatric addiction and domestic violence are also issues. Some recovery supports in the area include Alcoholics Anonymous (meetings are every night between Ely, Babbitt, and Tower), Narcotics Anonymous (meetings are once a week), and two CODA groups sponsored by Northern Lights Clubhouse (a safe space for adults in mental health recovery). Wellbeing Development and Behavioral Health Network operate sister organizations. There is a NAMI connections group for mental health support, and veterans have started a support group in Ely. Range Mental Health is trying to place a counselor in town, which currently only has a Rule 25 assessor. Essentia has received a grant for opioid work, and E- PARC (Ely - Prevention Abuse Recovery Coalition) has a presence.

An Ely Physician's Perspective

- Essentia has an Opioid Stewardship Program that aims maintain appropriate prescribing, seek alternative pain methods, and address Opioid Use Disorder & provides plans for MAT.
- Substance abuse has increased in rural communities and the main presenting issue in primary care.
- Prescription narcotics and meth are sold and abused in Ely.
- Telemedicine can be used for Rule 25 Assessments.
- Ely has some counselors but no alcohol treatment centers.
- Ely has 3 suboxone prescribers, but suboxone and other MAT services need to be more accessible.
- Tobacco and vaping laws need to change (taxation, economic motivation).
- People using drugs are more likely to suffer complications and death from COVID-19.
- Education is needed around alcohol abuse, stigma and naloxone

Eveleth, Hibbing, Hoyt Lakes

Hibbing: Substance use presents prevalent issues for this area including opioid overdose and used needles. Chad Nickila (Virginia Police Department [VA PD]) has led programs around substance use awareness for parents and teachers in the community. Lakeview (Hibbing) has an adolescent treatment program.

Eveleth: Substance use is prevalent and affects the community. Used needles in public areas are a concern, and needs include greater community presence at community and CAPE forums, adolescent substance use resources including a detox center, and trainings such as CAPE suicide prevention, naloxone (for communities and youth), mental health awareness, and HIV/AIDs. Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous have older populations but are accepting to younger individuals.

Hoyt Lakes: There is less sustainable employment due to fewer mines in the area. Numerous bars in the community provide easy access to alcohol, which is commonly abused, along with marijuana and meth. Most CPS cases involve meth and alcohol. Substance abuse contributes to a decline in family structure and financial stability. "Work hard, play hard," is a cultural mindset of the area. Prevention in schools is needed, as well as treatment centers, LADCs, therapists, mental health services, and PRS. A community forum that includes how substance use disorders affect the community would be helpful.

General needs in the Iron Range: Placing an LADC or social worker in each school, PRS, and non-faith based treatment options. The recovery community is strong but hidden due to stigma.

Five Major Barriers/Needs

1. **Per Cap:** While Per Cap funds can be used in a positive manner, access to the monthly payments for those with SUDs can be a concern. Outside illegal drug sellers travel to the reservation on the day that Per Cap is dispensed.
2. **Staff turnover:** There are very few social workers to address SUD on or near the reservation. They are overworked with dozens of cases, causing them to burn out and quit. Their clients then have to start over and develop a relationship with a new social worker.
3. **COVID-19** has made it harder for people to meet in person. Many meetings have moved to online platforms that lack the person-to-person contact that some people need.
4. **Intergenerational cycles:** Children who grow up surrounded by addiction see it as a norm and are more likely to struggle with substance use disorders in their adulthood.
5. **Damage of addiction:** Addiction has exacerbated a loss of culture, sense of identity, work ethic, and healthy relationships. These issues are also fed by historical trauma.

Gaps, Growing Edges, and Questions for Future Growth

- **Elders and others have a hard time discerning support versus enablement.**
 - For example, how do you love and support your family while holding them accountable for their actions and substance use?
- Are there trainings or education that can be offered on how to balance these issues?
- **COVID-19 moved meetings online.**
 - Is it possible to have meetings in-person?

- Are there precautions that can be taken to keep people safe?
- **While helpful to many, the Per Cap was cited as an issue for those with SUDs.**
 - Changing the Per Cap to vouchers that can be redeemed for food, education, or Medication Assisted Therapy (MAT) is a possibility.
- **Grant-funded training offered by the University of Minnesota Extension have been helpful.**
 - Link to trainings, such as Mending Broken Hearts and Healing Through History:
 - <https://opioid.umn.edu/about/american-indian-resource-and-resiliency-team>
 - Is there a way to have these trainings online or in person with precautions?
- **Cultural trainings are something that would be helpful.**
 - What trainings are offered on Ojibwe culture?
 - How can these be held safely?

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