



Maryland SOS Regional Town Hall Series Impact Statement: West Baltimore City

Takeaways from our Town Hall held at St. Bernardine Church

November 3rd, 2021

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Our third Maryland Stop Overdose Strategy (Maryland SOS) Regional Town Hall was held at St. Bernardine Roman Catholic Church of Baltimore on Wednesday, November 3rd, 2021. This session was focused on engaging community members from neighborhoods in West Baltimore City.

OCCC Executive Director Robin Rickard provided an update on overdose trends at the state level and in Baltimore City. She also provided information on the Opioid Restitution Fund and the potential uses of funds that Maryland will receive from legal settlements with prescription opioid makers and distributors. Lastly, Executive Director Rickard provided an update on the work of the Racial Disparities in Overdose Task Force on behalf of Dr. Aliya Jones, deputy secretary for Behavioral Health at the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and co-chair of the task force.

We were also joined by Erin Russell, head of the MDH Center for Harm Reduction Services, who presented on the efforts of her office to address overdose mortality through various harm-reduction initiatives. This includes targeted naloxone distribution through 53 different organizations in Baltimore City. She also discussed the Rapid Analysis of Drugs program, a collaborative project between MDH and the Maryland State Police to better understand changes in illicit drug supply.

Last in our program, Councilmember Kristerfer Burnett from the Baltimore City Council's 8th District also provided remarks. He spoke about his personal connection to the opioid crisis and the effects that it has had on the local community.

Following our presentations, we heard public testimony from a wide range of individuals, such as representatives from community-based organizations, local treatment providers, individuals in recovery, and advocacy groups, who shared their personal experiences and their ideas for addressing the opioid and overdose crisis. The issues addressed by community members included:

- Reducing barriers to substance use disorder services in minority communities resulting from systemic racism.
- Implementing overdose prevention sites.
- Community relations with law enforcement, the criminalization of paraphernalia, and incarceration for drug-related offenses.
- Increasing support for individuals who have lost a friend or a family member to a fatal overdose.
- Ensuring that treatment beds are available to those who need them.

- The prevalence of fentanyl in the supply of illicit drugs.
- Increasing access to medications for opioid use disorder, especially for individuals who are being released from incarceration.
- The potential benefits of sharing data between emergency medical services and community organizations in order to target outreach efforts in affected areas.
- Increasing access to harm reduction services.
- The potential benefit of sharing data on the overprescribing of opioids through the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program.
- The need to treat people with substance use disorders with compassion.
- Promoting access to recovery support services, continuums of care, and care coordination.
- The difficulty of initiating buprenorphine when fentanyl can delay a potential patient's ability to first become medically stable.
- Increasing services that consider the specific needs of marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community.
- The need to personalize treatment options and other support services based on individual needs.
- Reducing stigma surrounding people who use drugs.
- Reducing stigma surrounding medications for opioid use disorder.
- Including more people with lived experience into conversations about how to address the opioid crisis.
- Increasing support for community organizations.
- Reevaluating regulations for halfway houses to prevent the exploitation of people who use drugs and to improve the quality of services.
- Understanding and addressing the social determinants of health.

- Increasing access to recovery services for people receiving medications of opioid use disorder.
- Increasing support services for young people in recovery.

The OOCC would like to thank everyone who participated in this session and for their shared dedication to helping those who are struggling with the disease of addiction. The feedback that we received will be used to help inform Maryland's strategy for addressing the opioid crisis through our Inter-Agency Opioid Coordination Plan, which is updated annually. We would also like to thank our hosts at St. Bernardine church and the Maryland Peer Advisory Council for their assistance in organizing this event.