



LANCASTER COUNTY OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEW

2025

Annual Report

January 1 - December 31, 2025

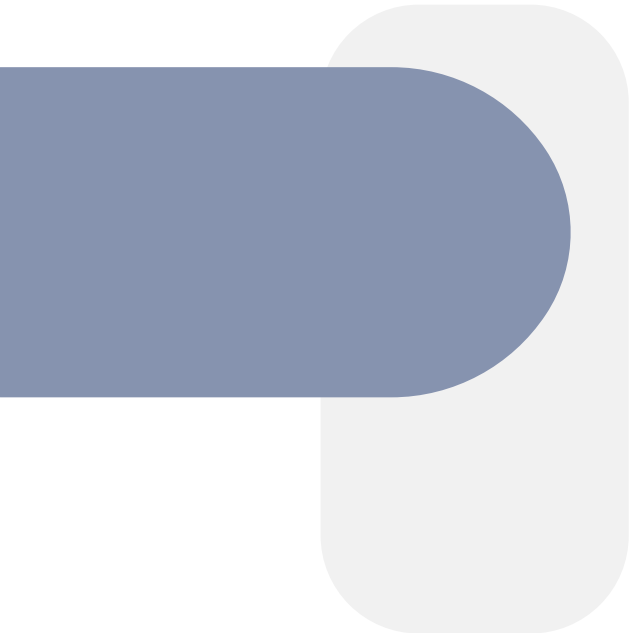
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Background

The Lancaster County Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) team is a multidisciplinary group convened to identify system gaps and recommend improvements to reduce preventable overdose deaths in our community. Operating under the authority of Act 101 of 2022, the team meets bi-monthly to confidentially review individual overdose cases, analyze patterns, and develop actionable recommendations aimed at strengthening public health interventions and varied community systems.

In 2025, the OFR team convened in five meetings to review a total of ten overdose fatalities occurring within Lancaster County. These reviews revealed persistent challenges related to healthcare systems improvement, recovery support services, and care or service coordination between varied community systems. Additionally, the review process continued to uncover gaps and barriers related to information sharing between organizations and systems. Based on these findings, the team developed targeted recommendations to support more coordinated, community-based responses to address system disparities and prevent overdose fatalities.



This report highlights key findings from the 2025 case reviews, including recurring themes, opportunities for system-level improvement, and strategies to strengthen the county's response to substance misuse and overdose deaths.

Lancaster County OFR remains committed to translating data-driven insights into system-level action through collaboration with local partners, with the goal of reducing disparities, strengthening community-based services, and preventing overdose deaths in our region.

OFR Team Overview

The Lancaster County Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) team was established to bring together partners from across systems to collaboratively review county overdose deaths and identify opportunities for prevention and system improvement. The team operates through Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health's Community Health - Substance Use Prevention Initiatives and functions in accordance with the Pennsylvania Department of Health's guidance under Act 101 of 2022.

The OFR team includes representatives from sixteen agencies and organizations across multiple disciplines. The team also includes five trained interviewers who conduct voluntary next-of-kin interviews, additional insight into the circumstances, service experiences, and system interactions that may have influenced a decedent's path.

In 2025, the OFR team held five in-person meetings and reviewed ten overdose fatality cases. Cases were selected in coordination with the Lancaster County Coroner's Office and prioritized based on overdose trends and their potential to generate actionable insights.

Participating Agencies and Organizations

Community Services Group
Compass Mark
The GateHouse
GOAL Project
Lancaster County Adult Probation and Parole Services
Lancaster County BH/BS
Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency
Lancaster County Drug and Alcohol Commission

Lancaster County Emergency Management Services
Lancaster County Forensic Center – Office of the Coroner
Lancaster Harm Reduction Project, Inc.
LGH STEPS Program
Pathways Center for Grief and Loss
Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health
School District of Lancaster
Union Community Care

Key Team Assignments

FACILITATOR/COORDINATOR

Leads OFR meetings, oversees the case selection process, coordinates team activities, develops policies and procedures to support OFR operations, and collects relevant data related to overdose fatalities to inform case reviews and recommendations.

DATA MANAGER

Maintains internal data systems and supports the analysis of findings to inform team discussions and recommendations development.

OFR TEAM MEMBERS

Participate in confidential reviews, provide system-specific insight, and assist in developing recommendations and intervention opportunities.

NEXT-OF-KIN INTERVIEWERS

Conduct interviews with family members, when appropriate, to gather background and lived experience data.

ADMINISTRATIVE & COORDINATION SUPPORT

The team is also supported by dedicated Penn Medicine LGH staff members who assist with meeting coordination, documentation, and cross-sector communication.

2025 Findings and Recommendations

In 2025, the OFR team identified recurring system-level challenges:

- **Care Fragmentation:** Persistent gaps in coordination across medical, behavioral health, recovery, social services, and corrections systems continue to disrupt continuity of care.
- **Access Barriers:** Structural barriers, such as transportation, language access, insurance literacy, and limited provider capacity, restrict timely access to treatment, medication-assisted treatment (MAT), and recovery supports.
- **Documentation & Assessment Issues:** Inconsistent assessments, terminology, and information-sharing across systems hinder accurate care planning and coordinated service delivery.
- **Healthcare Access for At-Risk Individuals:** Individuals at elevated risk, particularly those experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, face inconsistent follow-up after ED visits, overdoses, or other treatment-related encounters.
- **Underutilized Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) and Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD):** MAT and MOUD remain inconsistently initiated and coordinated, particularly in emergency departments and primary care settings.
- **Behavioral Health Gaps:** Limited integration between mental health and substance use treatment, and inconsistent peer support, contributes to fragmented care and missed opportunities for stabilization.
- **Outreach & Education:** Community outreach remains insufficient to address stigma, expand naloxone education, and engage individuals who are isolated or disconnected from services.

Key Recommendations to Improve Systems of Care and Community Resources in Lancaster County

Access to Care & Patient Navigation

- Increase access to linguistically and culturally appropriate healthcare and behavioral health services by expanding language specific supports and strengthening pathways to care for non English speakers.
- Improve patient understanding of Medicaid benefits and insurance coverage through clear, accessible education that reduces barriers to ongoing care.
- Strengthen pathways for primary care providers to connect patients with urgent dental needs to appropriate dental services and resources.

Behavioral Health

- Improve coordination between mental health and substance use treatment providers by reinforcing shared protocols, clarifying when symptoms are MH-driven versus SUD-driven, and expanding opportunities for cross-training and joint case review.
- Foster timely access to therapeutic services for individuals with mental health diagnoses by strengthening communication and care-planning across providers.
- Integrate mental health peer support into wraparound care coordination to promote social connection, engagement, and recovery for individuals with serious mental illness.

Key Recommendations

Care Coordination

- Strengthen cross-system communication and warm handoff protocols between healthcare, behavioral health, recovery supports, and community supervision to improve continuity of care.
- Establish consistent information-sharing and follow-up standards across treatment providers and community corrections agencies to support individuals under minimal or active supervision.
- Improve transitional care planning and structured handoffs in recovery homes.

Harm Reduction & Shelter Supports

- Expand community and family education on naloxone use by promoting awareness, reducing stigma, and increasing access to training.
- Support shelter policies that allow residents to retain and self administer prescribed medications to ensure safe, stigma free medication management.
- Continue ongoing harm reduction training for shelter staff and ensure shelters maintain visible, reliable on site naloxone access points.

Key Recommendations

Healthcare & Emergency Department Response

- Enhance ED evaluation, referral, and follow up processes for individuals treated for overdose or positive drug screens.
- Implement protocols for post-overdose follow-up and brief observation to better engage individuals after overdose reversal, including those who initially refuse care.
- Expand ED based buprenorphine induction and ensure coordinated linkage to community treatment.
- Utilize post-overdose follow-up and brief observation protocols to better engage individuals after reversal, including those who initially refuse care.

Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)

- Reduce transportation barriers to methadone and other MAT services by strengthening transportation supports and addressing limited public transit options.
- Strengthen primary care-based addiction medicine by improving care coordination and ensuring PCPs notify addiction medicine teams when discontinuing MAT patients.
- Expand ED-initiated buprenorphine induction and ensure coordinated linkage to area MAT providers to support continuity of treatment.

Key Recommendations

Recovery Support & Reentry

- Strengthen warm handoffs and coordinated follow-up between treatment settings and long-term recovery supports to ensure continuity of care.
- Expand outreach and engagement strategies for individuals without strong community connections to improve linkage to recovery supports.
- Improve reentry planning and post-incarceration follow-up through standardized handoff processes and timely linkage to community-based services.
- Promote comprehensive, up-to-date biopsychosocial assessments in state and county community supervision settings.
- Increase access to peer-to-peer recovery support, including early engagement of a 1:1 recovery specialist during transitions in care.
- Incorporate supportive family members (with consent) into reentry planning to reinforce stability and treatment engagement for individuals returning to the community.

Youth & Community Supports

- Expand education and career pathways for at risk youth by conducting targeted outreach and connecting youth with opportunities that support long term stability.
- Increase clarity and accessibility of behavioral health treatment language by promoting plain language materials and standardized terminology for clients and families.
- Strengthen community outreach to underserved populations by addressing stigma, improving naloxone awareness, and enhancing engagement for individuals disconnected from services.

Broader System Challenges Identified Through Case Review

In addition to targeted recommendations identified through case review, the OFR also noted broader system challenges that contribute to overdose risk but fall outside its immediate priorities. These recurring issues are included to inform future discussion and longer-term planning among system partners.

Reentry, Recovery Supports, & Community Stability

- Support more streamlined processes to ensure timely access to prescribed medications upon release from correctional institutions, including stronger coordination with primary care and improved record-sharing.
- Promote stable transitions from incarceration to community supports by reducing barriers to treatment, workforce development, housing, and other stabilizing supports.
- Consider expanding county- or state-level standards for corrections handoffs by establishing uniform expectations for reentry planning and shared data systems.
- Strengthen recovery housing standards and oversight through policy and funding strategies that support transitional care planning, continuity of services, and structured recovery supports for individuals at elevated risk of overdose.
- Promote GED and vocational training programs that strengthen pathways to recovery and integrate referrals to recovery support resources.
- Promote timely follow-up and coordinated linkage to supports when social or housing concerns are identified during care or community supervision.

Broader System Challenges

System Coordination & Accountability

- Consider stronger accountability measures to ensure health systems and provider organizations comply with OFR record requests and information sharing requirements.
- Consider state-level statutory or regulatory measures that strengthen compliance expectations for OFR record requests.

Harm Reduction & Treatment Safety

- Advocate for EMS organizations to consistently leave Narcan kits at overdose response events and ensure regular training on leave-behind procedures.
- Encourage methadone treatment facilities to apply consistent safeguards when determining eligibility for take-home methadone doses, including enhanced review for individuals with indicators of elevated overdose risk.
- Support methadone treatment facilities in developing family-friendly policies that reduce barriers for caregivers seeking treatment.

Broader System Challenges

Prevention, Early Intervention, & Behavioral Health Access

- Broaden public education campaigns on treatment systems, terminology, and expectations, including multilingual and culturally responsive materials.
- Support community-level strategies that respond to complex trauma and early-life adversity by expanding trauma-informed care across diverse community settings.
- Support expansion of youth behavioral health and early intervention systems, including school-based services, early screening, and diversion programs.
- Support broader efforts to streamline and align terminology, eligibility criteria, and referral pathways across behavioral health and addiction treatment systems.
- Strengthen mental health infrastructure across the lifespan through expanded services, workforce development, and reduced treatment wait times.

Addressing these challenges with coordinated, system-wide engagement will help ensure more consistent, timely, and effective support for residents across Lancaster County.

Implementation Efforts

In addition to targeted recommendations identified through case review, the OFR also noted broader system challenges that contribute to overdose risk but fall outside its immediate priorities. These recurring issues are included to inform future discussion and longer-term planning among system partners.

Data Management & Dissemination

Following a shift in data management responsibilities in 2024, these functions were successfully integrated into the overall OFR coordination role in 2025. As a result, comprehensive data management, including the analysis of case-related data, review findings, and evolving drug trends, is now a core component of Lancaster County OFR coordination.

Recommendation Tracking System

The OFR has implemented a centralized tracking database to monitor the status of key recommendations. This internal system allows the team to organize recommendations by focus area, track implementation milestones, and identify cross-sector partners responsible for execution, creating a clear framework for long-term accountability.

OFR Subcommittees

The team made important progress in moving beyond data collection alone, laying the foundation for a more active role in community implementation. In the final quarter of 2025, the OFR began developing specialized subcommittees – smaller, targeted workgroups designed to advance and support selected recommendations.

This effort officially launched in early 2026. Moving forward, the team will continue to identify potential partners and plan for increased collaboration to support these implementation efforts.

Information Sharing Pathways

The OFR has successfully strengthened information-sharing pathways by securing increased cooperation from community service providers. Through closer partnership, providers are now more responsive to OFR record requests, ensuring the team has timely access to the necessary data needed for thorough case reviews.

Barriers & Challenges

Several barriers identified in the previous year's report persisted through 2025. These challenges continued to affect the team's ability to conduct timely, comprehensive case reviews and engage all relevant stakeholders.

Delayed Case Referrals: Procedural and administrative challenges have led to frequent delays in receiving overdose case information, significantly impacting the team's ability to thoroughly prepare for and conduct complete, well-informed reviews.

Limited Participation from Key System Partners: The lack of consistent participation from key stakeholders has restricted the team's ability to conduct fully informed, system-level reviews.

Complications Obtaining Records from External Sources: The team had difficulty obtaining essential records needed for comprehensive case reviews.

Challenges in Conducting Next-of-Kin Interviews: Procedural limitations have hindered the team's ability to consistently conduct next-of-kin interviews.

OFR Outreach, Engagement, & Communication

Stakeholder Engagement: Team members actively engaged with potential partner agencies to increase awareness of the OFR's mission and to encourage broader participation. These efforts focused on expanding representation from healthcare systems and community-based organizations.

OFR Report Sharing: Key findings from OFR case reviews were shared with both internal and external stakeholders through various engagement opportunities throughout the year. 2024 findings were featured in that year's annual report, which remains publicly available online.

Next Steps for Lancaster County OFR

Key focus areas for 2026-2027:

Expand Community Education on Emerging Substance Use Trends

The OFR aims to broaden community understanding of the local drug supply by highlighting the increasing risks posed by non opioid substances and shifting polysubstance patterns. By continuously analyzing these local trends and sharing our findings with community stakeholders and the public, the OFR will support more informed prevention and response efforts.

Bolster Overdose Surveillance & Case Selection Processes

To address administrative delays in choosing cases for review, the OFR will work closely with the Lancaster County Coroner's Office to obtain more comprehensive fatal overdose data that the office is able to request from the Pennsylvania Department of Health. OFR access to this dataset will reduce the administrative burden on the coroner's office while improving the speed and accuracy of case selection. Most importantly, it ensures reviews reflect current risks and patterns.

Reform Next-of-Kin (NOK) Interview Workflow

To ensure that family interviews remain a consistent, core part of the OFR process, the OFR seeks to assume full responsibility for all NOK outreach and coordination, a function currently initiated by the Lancaster County Coroner's Office. Transitioning the entire NOK workflow to the OFR will support a more reliable, timely, and trauma informed approach to family engagement and will help preserve the critical insights that NOK interviews contribute to comprehensive case reviews.

Address Statewide Compliance Challenges in Record Sharing

The OFR will continue to engage with state legislators and partners to address ongoing barriers related to provider compliance with OFR record sharing requests. Strengthening statewide alignment and clarifying provider obligations will support more complete case reviews and reinforce OFR's role as an authorized public health function.

Our Continued Commitment

In 2025, the Lancaster County Overdose Fatality Review shifted from a growing initiative into a more coordinated, action-driven public health initiative. Over the past year, we focused on making our review process more efficient and effective, allowing us to better serve our county as a tool for real community impact.

Moving forward, our focus is on turning our data into action. In the coming year, we will focus on tracking how our recommendations are being put into practice, expanding our subcommittees to handle key priorities, and closely monitoring regional drug trends to stay ahead of prevention needs. We will also continue to invite new community partners to the table across different sectors.

None of this work is possible without the incredible dedication of our team members and community partners. We are deeply grateful for the time, expertise, and resources you generously share with us. Your collaboration is what drives this effort, and together, we remain focused on saving lives and improving care for vulnerable individuals in our community.

Contact Us

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