

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

County Courthouse
311 Grand Avenue, Suite #108
Bellingham, WA 98225-4082



Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE ORDER 2024-02
ADDRESSING FENTANYL IN WHATCOM COUNTY**

WHEREAS, according to [WhatcomOverdosePrevention.org](https://www.whatcomoverdoseprevention.org), there were 136 overdose deaths in Whatcom County in 2023, exceeding prior year deaths and representing a trend of marked increase every year since 2018; and

WHEREAS, the United States is facing the worst drug crisis in its history, and the resulting tragedies are decimating families and contributing to extraordinary levels of despair in our communities; and

WHEREAS, there exists a proven risk to persons and property and further efforts must be taken to reduce the threat from fentanyl; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Drug Enforcement (DEA) identifies fentanyl as a potent synthetic opioid drug approximately 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin; and

WHEREAS, seven out of ten DEA tested pills with fentanyl are potentially deadly making it likely that 'one pill can kill,' and in 2023, the DEA seized over 360 million deadly doses of fentanyl; and

WHEREAS, our community's approach to the fentanyl use and fentanyl-related crimes must be different than our approach to other illegal drug use in our community; and

WHEREAS, the use of Fentanyl continues spreading throughout our community, and new and immediate avenues to enhance capabilities, coordination, and collaboration across local, state, tribal, and federal agencies are needed to promote public health and safety; and

WHEREAS, in June 2023, healthcare workers, tribal leaders, educators, community members and law enforcement gathered for a 2-day workshop, All Hands Whatcom: Opioid Summit, as a call to listening, healing, and action for the Whatcom community in response to the devastating consequences of fentanyl, meth, and opioids; and

WHEREAS, in June 2023, a coalition of government agencies, community-based organizations, healthcare providers, and others from across Whatcom County formed a Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group in response to the local opioid and overdose crisis; and

WHEREAS, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), multi-agency coordination system (MAC) is used for extraordinarily large, complex incidents occurring in the city or county involving numerous agencies and/or jurisdictions; and

WHEREAS, the [mission of the MAC group](#) is to coordinate the ongoing community-wide response efforts to the opioid crisis, identify and prioritize additional short-term objectives and strategies to reduce drug-related deaths, and mitigate the impacts on property and public safety in Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County MAC group aligns with the Washington State Opioid and Overdose Response (SOOR) plan, which includes five priority goals

1. Prevent opioid misuse,
2. Identify and treat substance use disorder,
3. Ensure and improve the health and wellness of individuals that use drugs,
4. Use data to detect opioid misuse/abuse, monitor illness, injury and death, and evaluate interventions,
5. Support individuals in recovery; and

WHEREAS, in July 2023, the Whatcom County Council passed [Ordinance 2023-039](#) and an accompanying [Justice Project Implementation Plan](#), which outlines Whatcom County's vision for reducing unnecessary incarceration through behavioral health, diversion, and other investments and programs; and

WHEREAS, on September 22, 2023, the Lummi Indian Business Council approved Resolution 2023-145, declaring a state of emergency in response to the fentanyl crisis; and

WHEREAS, Resolution 2023-145 provides the Lummi Indian Business Council with new and immediate avenues to enhance capabilities, coordination, and collaboration across tribal, local, state, and federal agencies and bring together state agencies, local law enforcement, and internal and external partners to pursue and achieve solutions that promote public health and safety on the Lummi Reservation; and

WHEREAS, on October 24, 2023, the Whatcom County Council approved Resolution 2023-041 supporting the Lummi Indian Business Council's (LIBC) state of emergency declaration in response to the fentanyl crisis; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County Council Resolution 2024-002 respectfully requests that the Governor of the State of Washington declare a statewide emergency to address the fentanyl crisis; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County Council Resolution 2024-003 respectfully requests that the President of the United States declare a national emergency to address the fentanyl crisis; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County has taken local steps to address substance use and in particular opioid and fentanyl use; and

WHEREAS, in the area of prevention, Whatcom County has provided additional Behavioral Health funds to school districts to provide more services to students; participated in All Hands Whatcom to deliver community training and engagement; developed education and marketing tools regarding fentanyl and other opioids; coordinated prevention efforts among four community prevention coalitions; and launched the [Whatcomoverdoseprevention.org](#) website with local overdose data, education materials, relevant laws, and Narcan available for order; and

WHEREAS, in the area of intervention, Whatcom County has funded additional re-entry specialists at jail to support transitions and ensure continuity of medication; opened the Anne Deacon Center with detox and

BH support; launched the Co-Responder program, the Alternative Response Team (ART) with an embedded position at WhatComm 911 dispatch, and the MRC and Response Systems Street Medicine Teams; expanded Ground-Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE), Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD); and expanded Mental Health Court to include Mental Health Sentencing Alternatives; distributed nearly 12,000 doses of Narcan to community members; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County has convened both the MAC Group and workgroups to improve Crisis System and Hospital care coordination and system improvement, and hired a dedicated Opioid Response Specialist position; and

WHEREAS, coordination and unified action with other levels of government, institutions, and community is critical for addressing fentanyl overdoses and their consequences on individuals, families, and society; and

WHEREAS, Bellingham Mayor Kimberley Lund issued Executive Order 2024-01 on February 20, 2024 to address the fentanyl crisis, with a particular focus in Downtown Bellingham; and

WHEREAS, on April 9, 2024, the Whatcom County Council passed Resolution 2024-017, which recognizes the fentanyl crisis as an emergency in Whatcom County and identifies approaches to the emergency.

BE IT ORDERED BY THE WHATCOM COUNTY EXECUTIVE, that Whatcom County departments shall undertake the following actions to address the Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Aftercare/Recovery (PITA) needs of our community, dependent on budget authority to be provided by the Whatcom County Council:

A. In the area of Prevention:

- a. Initiate a multi-jurisdictional, multi-media substance use disorder and overdose prevention education campaign;
- b. Continue prevention coalition and other work to explore and apply evidenced based prevention models to Whatcom County;
- c. Expand opportunities for community, first responder, and medical training on opioids, overdose prevention and intervention, use of Narcan, and medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD);
- d. Increase litter clean-up in public spaces;
- e. Implement strategies to reduce the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and mitigating the individual and public health impacts of encampments;
- f. Purchase and distribute lock bags for personal use safe storage of both prescription and illicit drugs; and
- g. Install and promote the use of at least one naloxone vending machine at a central location;
- h. Promote proper disposal of unused medications; and
- i. Ensure a community resource hub and website that includes service and treatment options for those who use fentanyl.

B. In the area of Intervention:

- a. Promote Good Samaritan Law protections in overdose situations;
- b. Embed Substance Use Disorder Professionals in key sites like the emergency department to connect people who have recently overdosed, or new parents who are currently using fentanyl or other substances, with treatment beds and resources;

- c. Embed Community Health Workers and Social Workers in outpatient healthcare clinics to improve outcomes, particularly for mothers and infants; and
 - d. Explore making non-fatal overdoses a reportable condition to Health & Community Services, implementation of an electronic reporting system, and the addition of capacity to contact all individuals who have experienced an overdose within one business day;
 - e. Work with partners to open a temporary facility, until a 23-hour crisis care center is built, to provide transportation, intake, resource connection, case management, basic medical care, and re-entry services to individuals who need a safe place to recover post-overdose or transition from jail or other institution to community;
 - f. Partner with fire and emergency medical systems and other jurisdictions to support an Overdose Response Team to connect people to follow up care and services, including the possible utilization of Community Health Workers in rural areas;
 - g. Expand community-wide access to supplies and services, such as naloxone, that decrease harm/risk to those with substance use disorder;
 - h. Explore the development of additional emergency shelter and transitional housing options specifically dedicated to substance use intervention and recovery;
 - i. Increase Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion/Let Everyone Advance with Dignity (LEAD) program capacity and explore options for expansion of Alternative Response Team (ART), community paramedicine, and short-term case management;
 - j. Explore options for use of MOUD in the field; and
 - k. Create an overdose death review panel with relevant partners.
- C. In the area of Treatment:
- a. Identify County properties for public/private treatment projects or investments and develop a pipeline and prioritization of facility-based treatment projects, informed by stakeholder input;
 - b. Work with treatment and service providers to expand program capacity, including for youth and pregnant women; enhance wraparound services and coordination; improve outcomes; and promote local workforce development and hiring.
 - c. Expand and diversify treatment services available in the jail; and
 - d. Support Whatcom County-based projects such as Lummi Nation's Stabilization and Withdrawal Management Service (SWMS) facility; and
 - e. Advocate at the state and federal level for adequate reimbursement rates for treatment services.
- D. In the area of Aftercare/Recovery:
- a. Increase recovery housing;
 - b. Partner to create additional recovery support facilities and community networks, like peer supports, support groups, and drop-in recovery spaces;
 - c. Enhance supported employment services;
 - d. Partner to provide additional transportation resources between jail, hospital, and services; and
 - e. Enhance re-entry services within and outside of the Whatcom County jail, including reducing barriers to successful re-entry such as criminal legal obligations.
- E. In the area of interdepartmental and multiagency coordination:
- a. By May 31, 2024, Whatcom County Health and Community Services shall prepare and submit to the Executive, in coordination with the Department of Emergency Management, a twenty-four month emergency response plan, staffing requests, and budget proposal to operationalize the above actions, including proposed work items that can be postponed; such plan shall incorporate related items from the Whatcom County

Justice Project Implementation Plan and include targets which would allow for rescission of this Executive Order; and

- b. Whatcom County Administrative Services shall coordinate with County Departments to prepare necessary budget requests to the Whatcom County Council to provide funding for the above response activities; and
- c. Institute an internal readiness group to resource and coordinate Executive Order deliverables so they are given the highest priority for Whatcom County government;
- d. Support efforts by the Whatcom County Sheriff to reduce booking restrictions, enhance in-custody treatment and transition services, and bolster re-entry supports; and
- e. Create mechanisms for close coordination and reporting with the City of Bellingham to ensure the Whatcom County Executive Order and City of Bellingham Executive Order are aligned and implemented effectively; and
- f. Create a publicly accessible monitoring and evaluation system to track goals, outcomes, and data regarding Whatcom County's response to the fentanyl emergency, including targets which would allow Whatcom County to stand down this emergency response; and
- g. Coordinate with the Whatcom County Council, city governments, tribal governments, and other partners to advocate for increased state, federal, private, and philanthropic funding to support local response to the fentanyl crisis, and to identify and advocate for local, state, and federal policy changes necessary to address this crisis, with the recognition that significant outside resources will accelerate the pace and scale of the County's work.
- h. Regularly convene Whatcom County's independently elected officials to coordinate fentanyl response and Justice Project implementation.

Dated this 10th day of April, 2024



Satpal Singh Sidhu
Whatcom County Executive