North Dakota Opioid Policy Environmental Scan: The Role of Policy, Systems and Environment

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Background

- The volume of opioid prescriptions in ND declined 34% from 2006 to 2020;[1] however, opioid deaths worsened.
- Treating individual patients is a necessary, but insufficient approach to improve population health outcomes. A policy, systems, and environment (PSE) approach that addresses the population is needed.
- Since 2007, every state has been working to address the opioid epidemic and best practices are now well understood.

Methods

- Shaver et al has identified six best practice domains for evaluating opioid-related harms at the state level (Table1).[2]
- Shaver's model was used to conduct a systematic review of North Dakota's opioid-related policy environment.
- Data included online searches and depth interviews with North Dakota stakeholders. Analysis included reviewing the policies and laws and their implementation status.
- Reviewing the data, an expert panel scored the six domains on a scale from 1-5, with scores of less than 3, 3-3.9, and 4-5 representing inadequate, adequate, and exemplary, respectively (Table 1).

Results

- North Dakota opioid-related policy scores ranged from 2.9-3.9 (Table 1). Those found to be in alignment with essential public health best practice standards were: Emergency response statutes (3.94), Opioid prescribing regulation (3.91), Prevention and education indicators (3.59), Opioid use data collection (3.24), and Medicaid expansion and utilization (3.32). The medical and behavioral health domain was found to be inadequate and not up to best practice (2.96).

Table 1: Best practice domain scores

Best Practice Domains	Scores
Opioid Prescribing Regulation, Limits and Monitoring	3.9
Medical and Behavioral Health Practice	2.9
Prevention and Education Indicators	3.5
Emergency Response Statutes	3.9
Opioid Use Data Collection	3.2
Medicaid Expansion and Utilization	3.3

- The domains are comprised of 15 variables (Figure 1).[2]
- The exemplary variables included the state's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), Regulations on opioid prescriptions, Prevention programs, and Access to Naloxone. The adequate variables included the Opioid task force, Regulation of pill mills, Informed consent for opioid treatment, Continuing medical education (CME) on opioids, Good Samaritan laws, Reporting of overdose cases and Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), and Medicaid expansion. The inadequate variables were Non-opioid pain management, Referral and access to treatment for opioid addiction, and Medicaid utilization.
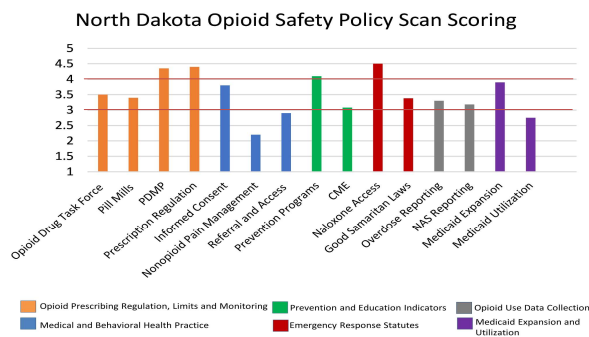

Figure 1: North Dakota Opioid Safety Policy Scan Scoring

To address the areas where the state is lagging behind, specific recommendations are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Recommendations for areas lagging behind

Inadequate Variables	Recommendations
Non-Opioid chronic pain management	• Increase funding for nonopioid pain management programs • Improve Medicaid reimbursement rates for nonopioid pain management
Referral and access to treatment	• Increase the number of addiction treatment providers • Enhance referral networks
Medicaid Utilization	• Expand reimbursable services, reduce prior authorizations

- A Policy, Systems, and Environment approach assumes that policy change at the highest level influences system changes, which then changes the local environment (Figure 2). This environmental scan has identified areas of needed change at the policy and systems levels.
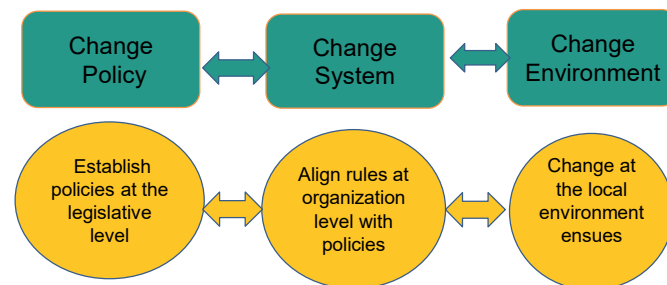

Figure 2: Model of a Policy, System and Environment Approach

Conclusion

- North Dakota opioid-related policies were found to be in close alignment with the public health best practice standards. However actual implementation at the community level could be improved.
- Areas of needed improvement include Non-opioid pain management, Referral and access to treatment for opioid addiction, and Medicaid utilization.
- Energizing the opioid task forces in the state based on the new opioid environment is needed.
- Greater intersectoral communication and strategic planning according to the PSE approach are needed to improve opioid mitigation in North Dakota.

References

1. North Dakota Opioid Dashboard (2019). Available at: https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiOWQ4ZTBjYjltYWEzZS00NDM4LWExNGQtOGlwZDI3MWNkZGNIliwidCl6IjJkZWEwNDY0LWRhNTEtNGE4OC1iYWUyLWIzZGI5NGJjMGM1NCJ9 (Accessed: February 6, 2023).
2. Shaver, C., Johnson, J., Greenhill, R., & Nadimidla, S. (2021). Comparative analysis of state level health policy support for opioid abuse mitigation in rural America. Journal of Health and Human Services Administration, 44(2), 137–161.

Acknowledgements

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ONE Program Website

Opioid and Naloxone Education

North Dakota Opioid Dashboard[1]