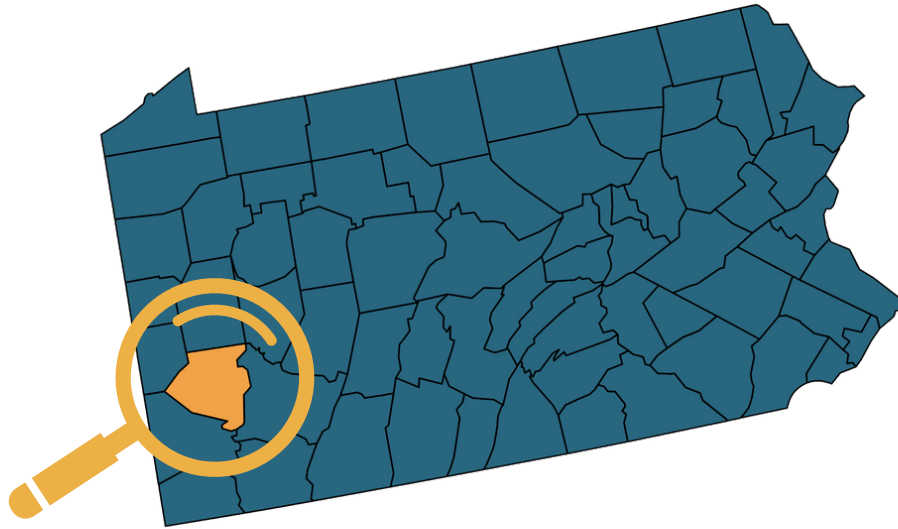


# A GLIMPSE INTO THE 2022 COSSUP PROJECT: PHASES I & II

## ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PA



*Saving lives through our pillars of:  
Collaboration, Access, Reducing Stigma, Education, Equity, & Support*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Allegheny County, the second-most populous county in Pennsylvania and home to the city of Pittsburgh is one of five sites part of the 2022 COSSUP Project. COSSUP provides financial and technical assistance to states and other units of government to develop, implement, or expand comprehensive efforts to identify, respond to, treat, and support those impacted by illicit opioids, stimulants, and other substances. This includes an emphasis on promoting racial equity and implementing public health harm reduction strategies to reduce overdoses among probation and reentry populations in Pennsylvania and, ultimately, saving lives. From January to August 2023, JSP conducted a hybrid needs assessment to identify Allegheny County's assets and gaps in the public health and criminal legal systems in an effort to build a comprehensive community-driven plan for the COSSUP funds.

A hybrid approach was utilized due to numerous needs assessments being conducted in Allegheny County in recent years. The needs assessment included virtual listening sessions with internal stakeholders and a document analysis of needs assessments, reports on substance use and overdose in Allegheny County, and information on county and community programs and providers. During this needs assessment, Project Rehabilitate was recommended as a promising program that can help support incarcerated or reentering individuals who experience SUD/ODU. Project Rehabilitate, a collaborative Public Defender-led initiative, seeks to reduce the number of opioid overdoses and opioid-related deaths in Allegheny County by reducing the risk of unnecessary incarceration of individuals who are seeking treatment for substance use.

As part of JSP's carefully planned inclusive approach to the needs assessment, a platform was provided for directly impacted individuals to articulate their experiences firsthand. Interviews were conducted with clients and judges who have worked with Project Rehabilitate to gather information about the program and its impact. In total, nineteen (19) individuals took part in the needs assessment process in Allegheny County.

The culmination of the needs assessment phase yielded a set of well-thought-out recommendations tailored specifically for Allegheny County to use its COSSUP funding effectively and in a meaningful and sustainable way. These recommendations, addressing critical areas such as collaboration, access to resources and treatment, stigma reduction, education, equity, and support, were instrumental in shaping the tactical planning phase of the project and can be found on the preceding pages.

Inspired by the identified gaps and overarching principles, the project was renamed COSSUP CAREES, symbolizing a commitment to comprehensive care and equitable solutions. The pillars of collaboration, access, stigma reduction, education, equity, and support form the cornerstone of COSSUP CAREES, interwoven to create a holistic framework for action. Looking ahead, the JSP team aims to navigate these pillars through intentionally collaborative, multi-disciplinary approaches. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these elements and addressing both barriers and solutions, COSSUP CAREES endeavors to effect meaningful change and save lives within Allegheny County.

# OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF SUBSTANCE USE IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Pennsylvania's overdose death rate ranks among the highest in the nation. Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, has not escaped the devastation caused by the opioid epidemic.

**646**

Reported accidental drug overdose deaths in Allegheny County in 2022.

**29%**

of overdose deaths in 2022 were experienced by Black individuals, despite comprising only 13% of the Allegheny County population.

**82%**

of drug overdose cases listed fentanyl as the primary drug.

**48%**

Of 2021 New Commit Drug Screened Admissions in the Allegheny County Department of Corrections reported Opioid Use.

**79%**

Of 2021 New Court Admissions in Allegheny County had a Diagnosed Substance Use Problem.

**32%**

Of 2021 New Court Admissions in Allegheny County reported Opioid use in the last year.

## Data obtained from:

OverdoseFreePA. 2022 Allegheny County Death Data.  
<https://www.overdosefreepa.org/know-the-facts/view-overdose-death-data/>

Open Data Pennsylvania. Inmate Admissions with Substance Use Year 2016 - Current Quarterly County Corrections.  
[https://data.pa.gov/Opioid-Related/Inmate-Admissions-with-Substance-Use-Year-2016-Cur/bvin-4fk2/about\\_data](https://data.pa.gov/Opioid-Related/Inmate-Admissions-with-Substance-Use-Year-2016-Cur/bvin-4fk2/about_data)

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE JSP TEAM

*It is important to understand that not every recommendation we make can be implemented. However, based on our findings, we have compiled the top recommendations to consider. It is up to each county to determine what is realistic to achieve with the COSSUP funds.*

- ★ Hire culturally responsive Attorneys, Peer Support Advocates, and a Project Manager for Project Rehabilitate at a livable and equitable wage.
- ★ Expand Project Rehabilitate services to additional inpatient treatment facilities and outpatient and behavioral health treatment centers. Consider expanding services to the Allegheny County Jail.
- ★ Resolve outstanding legal issues including traffic, probation, and criminal warrants, while individuals are in inpatient treatment.
- ★ Peer Support Advocates can provide support with navigating the legal system and educating clients on their current cases. These individuals can also provide a warm hand-off after release from inpatient treatment to ensure clients are connected to resources to support social determinants of health.
- ★ Utilize Peer Support Advocates and Project Rehabilitate support staff to provide clients with access to harm reduction resources, including naloxone (Narcan), medication-assisted treatment (MAT), fentanyl and xylazine testing strips, and drug lock boxes. Utilize the PA Overdose Prevention Program to request a supply of naloxone and/or testing strips for yourself or your organization.
- ★ Share stories from Project Rehabilitate participants and their families and loved ones via creative storytelling mediums, including the COSSUP CAREES community of practice.
- ★ Involve community members and people with lived experience with SUD/ODU or criminal legal system involvement – specifically Black and Brown individuals – in all aspects of addressing SUD/ODU, including leadership positions and planning processes.
- ★ Explore options to provide transportation to treatment. Consider partnering with Danny's Ride, a non-profit that provides free rides to recovery services for people living with substance use disorder.

# ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PA

# COSSUP STRATEGIES

1

## Strategy #1

Expand Project Rehabilitate, an initiative through the Public Defender's office, to serve more clients and continue reducing overdose deaths in the Allegheny community.

2

## Strategy #2

Hire two Peer Support Advocates to support clients and provide warm hand-offs after clients leave inpatient treatment.

4

## Strategy #4

Provide trauma-informed training and harm reduction education for staff, community members, and key stakeholders.

3

## Strategy #3

Develop a self-sustaining model for clearing warrants, fines, and fees for people in inpatient treatment in other jurisdictions.

