

Meds-First Initiative

Fact Sheet

Overview

The Meds-First Initiative removes barriers to medications for Opioid Use Disorder and provides an innovative research-based model of care to high needs populations, such as people experiencing homelessness. Led by the University of Washington's Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute (ADAI), the program will provide treatment at four locations across Washington State: North Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Walla Walla.

The Meds-First Initiative will create a new “front door” to Opioid Treatment Networks (OTN) for underserved populations with sites located at places where people already access care. Those who seek care will receive it as soon as possible and will have assistance to address needs that support their recovery. The initiative is expected to serve more than 1,200 patients over two years.

Why Medications for Opioid Use Disorder?

Medications like buprenorphine have been proven effective in reducing mortality rates by at least 50 percent, but currently only 15-25 percent of individuals with Opioid Use Disorder have access to them. This disconnect is driving worse health outcomes and higher healthcare costs.

Without medication, the average medical costs of a person with opioid use disorder is \$30,000 a year. The Meds-First model could cut costs to less than \$10,000.

The Meds-First Initiative Sites

Each site will employ care navigators, nurse care managers and prescribers. Nurses and prescribers will provide medical care and care navigators will serve people from first contact through initial medication stabilization, and onto long term health care management and recovery. University of Washington's Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute will provide ongoing support, training, technical assistance, and clinical consultation for staff.

- **North Seattle:** Neighborcare Health at St. Vincent de Paul—Aurora
- **Spokane:** Spokane Regional Health District
- **Tacoma:** Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department in partnership with Tacoma Needle Exchange
- **Walla Walla:** Blue Mountain Heart to Heart

Funding and Support

Funding for the project comes from:

- Paul G. Allen Family Foundation – \$4.25 million
- Washington Health Care Authority – \$2.6 million
 - To train and employ nurse care managers at each care unit.
- Premera Blue Cross – \$1 million
 - Focused on Spokane and Walla Walla.
- Ikigai Fund at Seattle Foundation – \$100,000

Lead Researcher

- Dr. Caleb Banta-Green, University of Washington's Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute

Study

University of Washington's Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute will conduct a comprehensive implementation research study to test the impacts of the intervention on: retention on medications for Opioid Use Disorder, emergency health care utilization and hospitalization, arrests, and overdose and all-cause deaths.

###