

Attendees: Madison Peterson (BBPH), Susan Kahler (BBPH), Renae Moch (BBPH), Theresa Schmidt (BBPH), Mary Bruns (ND HHS), Kandy Swenning (CHI St. Alexius), Katie Fitzsimmons (NDUS), Denae Tokach (Bismarck Community Options), Jena Gullo (MSA United Way), Jennifer Harrington (Sanford Bismarck), Kurt Snyder (Heartview Foundation), Kodi Pinks (Epidemiologist, NDHHS), Liz Kapella (BBPH Nurse-Family Partnership), Amy Jo Bhend (Minot State University Student), Mike Ness (HIDTA ND ORS), Cathy Palczewski (Heartview), Luke Kapella (NDBCI, Metro Area Narcotics Task Force), Tina Johnner, Mikaela Brandner (Minot State University Student), Kris Morrisette (Ministry on the Margins), Kyle Kirchmeier (Morton Co. Sheriff's Dept.), Melanie Hanson (Centre Inc. Mandan), Michelle E. (Abuse Adult Resource Center), Randy Ziegler (Bismarck Police Department), Wendy Hafner-Bakken (BHS School Coordinator), Charlotte Williams (CDC Foundation ORS/ND DHHS Behavioral Health Division), Carrie Sorenson (Quality Health Associates of ND), Darrin Heinert, Gary Schaffer (Burleigh Co. Sheriff's Dept.), Ben Johnson (Bismarck Public School), Jeremiah Seeklander, Jason Ziegler (Mandan Police Department), K. Leben, M. Heinert, Michael Schmitz.

Total Attendance: 31

Welcome/Introductions:

Renae Moch, Director, Bismarck-Burleigh Public Health (BBPH)

Renae Moch welcomed participants and coordinated introductions.

Renae Moch provided an update on the Community Triage Center project, sharing that the Bismarck City Commission approved the final report from Health Management Associates, concluding the planning phase and moving into phase two, which involves organizing for action and forming subcommittees with steering committee entities. The planning phase for the Community Triage Center has concluded following the Bismarck City Commissions approval and the project is now entering phase two. Phase two focuses on organizing for action; Renae explained that subcommittees are being formed with entities from the original steering committee to continue progress. Renae invited coalition members to reach out for additional information about the triage center and its ongoing development, emphasizing openness to questions and further engagement.

County Level Assessment for Drug Overdoses in ND

Mary Bruns, Harm Reduction Epidemiologist

Mary Bruns presented a comprehensive county-level assessment of drug overdose risks in North Dakota, explaining the use of social vulnerability indexes, key risk factors, and the importance of identifying at-risk counties to guide prevention and resource allocation, with follow-up questions from Renae Moch and Susan about local data access. Mary described the CDC's social vulnerability index, which uses demographic, socioeconomic, housing, and transportation data to identify counties at risk for adverse outcomes like disease outbreaks and drug overdoses. She recounted the 2015 HIV outbreak in Indiana, highlighting how factors such as unemployment, lack of education, poverty, and limited healthcare access contributed to the rapid spread,

prompting other states, including North Dakota, to analyze local vulnerabilities. The assessment found that counties with high rates of uninsured individuals, poverty, teen births, gonorrhea, low vehicle access, and low educational attainment were at increased risk for hepatitis C and drug overdose outbreaks. Mary reported that fatal drug overdoses in North Dakota increased by 60% between 2019 and 2023, with opioids as the leading cause, and discussed the emergence of novel substances like xylazine. The analysis of protective and risk factors within the counties showed that limited vehicle access, mobile home residency, high HIV rates, and few ER providers increased overdose risk, while the presence of psychiatrists, hospitals, and syringe service programs were protective. Mary emphasized the role of harm reduction services, such as syringe service programs, Narcan distribution, and educational outreach, in lowering overdose risks and improving health outcomes. The assessment maps and related data are available via a PDF link, which includes an additional model on hepatitis C, and provided access details in response to Susan's question. Renae Moch asked about specific risk factors for Burleigh County, to which Mary explained that higher population and relatively new harm reduction efforts contribute to increased risk in urban areas.

Link for pdf of index/map: [social-vulnerability-index.pdf](https://www.burleighcounty.org/social-vulnerability-index.pdf)

Subcommittee Updates:

Prevention & Education Subcommittee

DFC Grant- Madison Peterson, SAP Intern

Madison Peterson outlined ongoing substance abuse prevention activities under the DFC grant, including kratom education, school presentations, community outreach events, and collaborative opportunities discussed with Luke Kapella and feedback from other coalition members. Madison described recent presentations on kratom at UTTC and upcoming presentation for Rolette County's Coalition meeting, noting increased community interest and the need for more education about kratom's effects and risks. Madison reported delivering alcohol and marijuana education presentations at BHS high school. Madison and the Tobacco Prevention Specialist attended the Dream Center Block Party, connecting with over 50 people to discuss public health services and substance abuse prevention. Luke Kapella proposed partnering with Madison on an educational program typically delivered in rural schools, and both agreed to coordinate efforts, including sharing information about kratom sales and trends observed by law enforcement.

Student Committee Updates

Madison Peterson provided updates about the BMBH Coalition student committee. Madison's student committee completed a large-scale sticker shock campaign during Super Bowl weekend, distributing over 2,000 stickers in partnership with 8 local pizza shops. Two of the student committee members were also able to advertise the event through a media interview. The student committee is also working on middle school alcohol presentations.

SOR Grant- Sue Kahler, SAP Coordinator (BBPH)

Susan Kahler provided updates on the state opioid response grant, detailing Narcan distribution and training, placement of overdose response boxes in high-risk locations, school-based trainings, and medication take-back events, with input from Madison and other coalition members. Susan shared data from first responders showing increased Narcan doses and lives saved in 2025, and described ongoing community and organizational Narcan trainings, including upcoming sessions and outreach to high schools and universities. Susan and Madison reported placing 39 overdose response boxes or OneBoxes in convenience stores and hotels, targeting

locations with high staff turnover and frequent overdose incidents, and providing training to staff. Narcan training was recently completed at Legacy High School for 189 students in medical careers classes, with plans for additional sessions at the University of Mary. Susan described four take-back events in 2025, collecting 141.14 lbs of unused medication, and noted a cumulative total of 469 lbs since 2021, with events held at senior centers, colleges, and law enforcement days. Madison shared positive feedback from convenience store staff about receiving the OneBox and discussed specific challenges faced by stores, such as customers locking themselves in bathrooms, highlighting the need for ongoing education and outreach.

Intoxication/Withdrawal Management

Treatment & Recovery Subcommittee

Cathy Palczewski, Heartview – Opioid Grant Project Manager

Cathy Palczewski provided an update on the street outreach program, reporting recent engagement numbers, challenges related to weather and population shifts, progress in connecting individuals to treatment, and increased kratom-related cases among clients. Cathy reported 84 encounters in the past week with the street outreach program, with fewer duplicates and noted that colder weather has led to decreased street numbers and more face-to-face contacts during open hours. During open hours, the outreach team connects individuals with resources such as housing, social services, SNAP, Medicaid, and assistance with IDs and birth certificates, with a recent increase in helping elders access assisted living. One individual from recent outreach started intensive outpatient treatment, which Cathy highlighted as a key goal of the grant, acknowledging the slow but steady progress in building trust and facilitating treatment entry. Cathy noted a rise in clients whose drug of choice is kratom, prompting increased education efforts to address misconceptions about its addictiveness and risks. The outreach program is preparing to submit an expansion and updated budget for the grant, aiming to spend down funds before the end of October and report to the Department of Justice.

OD Dashboard

Kodi Pinks, Unit Director, Surveillance and Data Management

Kodi A Pinks presented the upcoming overdose surveillance dashboard, detailing its features, data sources, and availability, and answered questions from Susan and Renae Moch about county-level data access and customization for local planning needs. Kodi described the dashboard's structure, including overall overdose counts, demographic breakdowns by county, age, race, and sex, and five-year rate calculations, with data lag due to toxicology result timelines. The dashboard will display the prevalence of poly-substance use in overdose deaths, showing that most cases involve multiple substances, and will include both fatal and nonfatal event data from emergency departments. Kodi confirmed that users can view counts and rates by county, with suppression for small numbers to protect privacy, and offered to provide more detailed data upon request for local planning and grant writing. Susan noted the value of the dashboard data for grant applications and reporting, and Kodi emphasized the collaborative effort involved in developing the tool, with plans to make it publicly available soon. Kodi and Mary Bruns also announced the development of county-specific substance use reports, which will include nonfatal and fatal overdose rates, narcotic violations, marijuana initiation, toxicology findings, and healthcare access metrics, with plans to share finalized versions at future meetings.

New Members/Organizations

Additional Comments:

Kratom Trends and Community Impact

Coalition members, including Madison Peterson, Luke Kapella, Cathy Palczewski, and Kodi A Pinks, discussed the growing prevalence of kratom in the community, its legal status, varied product forms, associated addiction issues, and the need for education and potential legislative action. Luke Kapella explained that kratom is legal and not actively targeted by the drug task force, but reported calls from clinics about addiction and described how local smoke shops manufacture and sell potent kratom products under their own brands. Madison and Luke described the wide range of kratom products available in convenience stores, including powders, pills, energy shots, and seltzers, noting that some products are highly potent and others contain synthetic ingredients. Madison shared that kratom-containing drinks have been found on school grounds, raising concerns about accessibility and exposure among youth, and emphasized the importance of education to address misconceptions about safety. Kodi and Cathy confirmed that kratom is often used in combination with other substances, and clients report difficulty stopping use, with addiction issues increasingly seen in treatment settings. Luke mentioned ongoing discussions among state lab and coalition members about potential legislative changes regarding kratom, following a failed bill in 2025 and subsequent increase in product availability.

Assignments/Next Meeting

May 5th, 2026, Tuesday at 10am-11:30am

Meeting Adjourned at 11:00am.

Meeting minutes taken by: Madison Peterson, SAP Specialist

The Mission Statement:

“To lead and guide a continuum of care model to reduce substance abuse & behavioral health issues in our communities.”

The Vision Statement:

“A safe, healthy, vibrant community, free of substance abuse, addiction and behavioral health issues.”

