

2022 MERC Needs Assessment Summary

To begin with, respondents all indicated that they all believe that Substance Use is an issue in their community. Their responses also revealed the complexity as it pertains to Substance Use in St. Clair and Madison Counties. The greatest concerns related to substance use in the community were identified as stigma (People Who Use Drugs' (PWUD) fear that others would invade their privacy and judge them negatively, and the sense that those in authority tend to engage in stigmatizing behavior toward PWUDs); ease of access to substances; the lack of coordinated agency response; the presence of co-occurring mental health concerns that complicate the treatment of SUD; and the high demand for inpatient treatment options. Most sinister of concerns included the rate of Overdose in local communities, which is also connected to the infusion of Xylazine and Fentanyl into those same communities.

Respondents identified poverty, lack of education, lack of parental engagement, lack of community supports/youth Prevention programs, and the prevalence and ready availability of substances as factors that contribute to the use of substances in their communities. However, respondents also identified local resources, including inpatient and outpatient programs; Harm Reduction services, including NARCAN distribution and MAT options; 12-step programs; and Recovery Community Organizations as options for people who desire recovery from Substance Use.

One looming point of concern that emerged as a significant obstacle for local individuals who are seeking treatment and Recovery is the unavailability of inpatient treatment spaces, commonly known as "beds." Here, MERC takes the liberty of interpreting an imminent need: when one considers that the decision to seek recovery is often crisis-driven and is accompanied by a sense of urgency, to pursue help and to find that there is no safe place to which one can turn often results in a sense of helplessness and defeat. Due to the seriousness of risk associated with the delays in services, this is a priority for MERC to address in the upcoming year.

Other priorities that the survey revealed include the need for: family support; trauma awareness; stigma reduction; sober living options; dissemination of information regarding community and provider resources; and Youth Prevention.