



FY26-FY27 STRATEGIC PLAN

Southland Recovery Coalition

Lead Agency: Cornerstone Community Development Corporation, NFP

Revised December 2025

Council Mission

The mission of SRC is to eradicate the stigmas associated with addiction recovery by promoting systemic improvements to the overall health, wellness, and recovery of individuals and families impacted by substance use, addiction, and mental illness.

Council Vision

The Southland Recovery Coalition envisions a community where all pathways lead to recovery, characterized by:

- Reduced stigma surrounding addiction and mental health challenges
- Accessible, high-quality recovery support services for all residents
- Strong partnerships across sectors (healthcare, law enforcement, faith, business, education)
- A recovery-supportive ecosystem that promotes healing, resilience, and long-term wellness
- Equity in access to services regardless of income, race, ethnicity, gender identity, or background

Needs Assessment

Community Demographics

The Southland Recovery Coalition serves south suburban Cook County and the eastern corridor of Will County, encompassing communities including Ford Heights, Calumet City, Chicago Heights, Glenwood, Lansing, Lynwood, Sauk Village, Park Forest, Steger, University Park, Crete, and Monee.

Key demographic characteristics:

- Total population: Approximately 700,000 residents, with an estimated 400,000 in recovery from substance use disorders
- Racial/ethnic composition: Predominantly African American and Latino communities
- Poverty level: High rates of poverty, unemployment, and economic instability, particularly in formerly industrial areas
- Housing challenges: Significant disinvestment, vacant properties, and limited affordable housing options

Overdose Data and Trends

The Southland region faces a severe overdose crisis:

- 594 overdose deaths in 2022, with 90% involving fentanyl
- Geographic disparities: Higher overdose death rates concentrated in zip codes with lower median incomes (60482 Worth, 60155 Broadview, 60153 Maywood, 60130 Forest Park, 60428 Markham/Harvey)
- 83.6% of opioid-involved overdose deaths involved more than one drug
- Rising substance use among minority youth and adult males aged 40+
- Substance use has decreased life expectancy in disinvested areas, contrasting sharply with Chicago's average of 77 years



Community Survey Results: Service Gaps

The Southland Recovery Coalition conducted a comprehensive community survey to identify gaps in recovery services. Key findings include:

Access Barriers:

- Difficulty finding mental health and substance use treatment services (strongly agreed/agreed by majority of respondents)
- Limited availability of Medication-Assisted Recovery (MAR) providers
- Insufficient harm reduction services like Narcan and syringe service programs
- Within the service area, Google searches and mapping technologies yield zero results for behavioral/mental health providers or recovery communities in some areas
- Inadequate public transportation, with some individuals traveling up to three hours to reach providers

Equity Concerns:

- Disparities in access to care based on income level, insurance status, race, ethnicity, primary language, disabilities, gender identity, sexual orientation, and citizenship status
- Communities of color experience disproportionate burden of health problems and discrimination

Stigma and Awareness:

- Persistent stigma toward people who use drugs and those with mental illness
- Need for increased public education about recovery and mental health

Funding and Resources:

- Strong support for increased government funding for treatment options
- Budget and staffing cuts across federal, state, and local levels threatening service continuity

Qualitative Data: Community Voices

Through focus groups and key informant interviews, community members identified critical recovery supports needed:

- Peer support services and recovery coaching
- Safe, affordable recovery housing options
- Workforce development and job readiness training
- Comprehensive wraparound services (housing assistance, transportation, legal aid, healthcare navigation)
- Reentry support for justice-involved individuals
- Trauma-informed care and culturally competent services
- Community-based recovery spaces and drop-in centers

Based on the inordinate amount of respondents (71%) that selected “neither agree nor disagree/neutral” when asked if MAR is an effective treatment for substance use disorders in the community survey-- community members emphasized the need to better understand what MAR is.

Structural Determinants of Health

Social and structural determinants drive health inequities in the Southland:

- Structural racism and ongoing disinvestment in communities of color
- Environmental factors: safety concerns, violence, gang activity, drug trafficking

Structural Determinants of Health continued

- Limited job opportunities and economic development
- Substandard schools in low-income communities
- Lack of positive community policing
- Need for treatment instead of incarceration for mental illness and substance use

Council Outreach and Communication Plans

Purpose

The communication plan aims to raise recovery awareness, reduce stigma, engage diverse stakeholders, and connect community members with recovery resources. Through strategic outreach, SRC seeks to amplify the voices of those in recovery, build collaborative partnerships, and foster a recovery-supportive ecosystem across the Southland region.

Objectives

The communication plan will accomplish:

- Increase public awareness about substance use disorders as a treatable medical condition
- Challenge and reduce stigma associated with addiction and mental illness
- Expand council membership and deepen member engagement
- Strengthen partnerships with community organizations, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders
- Disseminate information about available recovery resources and services
- Amplify stories of recovery to inspire hope and demonstrate that recovery is possible
- Advocate for policy changes and increased funding for recovery supports

Target Audiences

SRC communicates with diverse audiences through tailored strategies:

Coalition Members

- Purpose: Engage, inform, and mobilize for collaborative action
- Information shared: Meeting agendas, minutes, strategic initiatives, volunteer opportunities
- Methods: Email, Zoom calls, quarterly in-person meetings, member portal

Stakeholder/Partner Organizations

- Purpose: Build partnerships, share resources, coordinate services
- Information shared: Collaborative opportunities, resource directories, training events, best practices
- Methods: Direct outreach, partnership meetings, joint events, email updates

Community/Public

- Purpose: Raise awareness, reduce stigma, connect individuals to services
- Information shared: Recovery resources, community events, educational content, success stories
- Methods: Social media (Facebook, Instagram), website (www.southlandrecovery.org), community pop-up events, presentations at schools/churches/businesses, newsletters

Marginalized Groups/Underrepresented Sectors

- Purpose: Ensure equity and inclusion in recovery services
- Information shared: Culturally responsive services, peer support opportunities, community voices in planning
- Methods: Targeted outreach to BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, youth, older adults, justice-involved populations; partnerships with community organizations; focus groups

Media

- Purpose: Shape public narrative, increase visibility of recovery issues
- Information shared: Press releases, recovery stories, data/statistics, events
- Methods: Media kits, press releases, interviews, collaboration with local villages

Key Messages

Core messages guide all communications:

- All pathways lead to recovery - We honor diverse recovery journeys
- Recovery is possible - Hope, healing, and transformation are achievable
- People who use drugs deserve respect - Stigma is a barrier to recovery
- Collaborative effort - Working together across sectors strengthens our community
- Inclusivity - Every person, regardless of background, deserves access to recovery supports
- Accountability - We meet people where they are with compassion and evidence-based support
- Community-driven - Those with lived experience guide our work

Communication Channels & Frequency

SRC utilizes multiple channels for comprehensive outreach:

Social Media

- Frequency: 3-5 posts per month
- Content: Recovery stories, events, resources, educational content, awareness campaigns
- Responsibility: Communications team and designated social media manager

Newsletter

- Frequency: Monthly
- Content: Council updates, upcoming events, spotlight stories, resources
- Responsibility: Communications team

Website

- Frequency: Ongoing updates
- Content: Resource directory, event calendar, about SRC, ways to get involved
- Responsibility: Web administrator

Community Events

- Frequency: Monthly pop-up events, quarterly major events
- Content: Recovery awareness, resource connection, Narcan distribution, community engagement
- Responsibility: Event planning committee, volunteer coordinator

Presentations/Workshops

- Frequency: As requested and/or scheduled (target: bi-monthly)
- Content: Mental health & wellness, stigma reduction, Narcan training, recovery education
- Responsibility: Speaker series coordinator, certified trainers

Press Releases/Media Outreach

- Frequency: As needed for major announcements/events
- Content: Conference announcements, campaign launches, significant milestones
- Responsibility: Communications director

Roles and Responsibilities

As SRC grows, member engagement will support specialized roles:

- Chair/Director: Overall strategic vision and leadership
- Communications Director: Oversees all communication strategies
- Social Media Manager: Daily social media engagement and content
- Volunteer Coordinator: Recruits and manages volunteers
- Event Planning Committee: Plans and executes community events
- Content Creators: Develop educational materials and stories

Evaluation & Feedback

SRC tracks communication effectiveness through:

- Social media insights: Reach, engagement, follower growth
- Website analytics: Page views, resource downloads, time on site
- Event participation: Attendance numbers, feedback surveys
- Newsletter metrics: Open rates, click-through rates
- Community survey responses: Awareness of services, stigma reduction measures
- Quarterly communication review meetings: Assess strategies and adjust approach

Council Goals, Objectives, and Outcome Measures

The following goals align with gaps identified in our needs assessment and reflect SRC's commitment to building a comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care.

Goal #1: Expand Community Engagement and Recovery Awareness

SMART Goal Statement:

Host at least 12 community outreach events (pop-ups, workshops, and presentations) by June 30, 2026, reaching a minimum of 1,200 community members to raise recovery awareness, reduce stigma, and connect individuals to recovery resources.

SMART Breakdown:

- Specific: Host 12 community outreach events including pop-ups, workshops, and presentations focused on recovery awareness, stigma reduction, and resource connection
- Measurable: 12 events minimum; 1,200 participants minimum; track attendance, demographics, and feedback surveys
- Achievable: Based on SRC's history of conducting monthly pop-ups and quarterly major events, with established partnerships across the Southland

SMART Breakdown continued:

- Relevant: Addresses community survey findings showing need for increased awareness and reduced stigma
- Time-bound: By June 30, 2026

Objectives (Strategies):

- Develop annual outreach calendar by January 15, 2026, identifying target communities and event formats
- Partner with at least 6 community organizations (schools, churches, businesses, barber/beauty shops) by February 1, 2026, to host events in diverse settings
- Conduct monthly pop-up events (minimum 1 per month) in high-need areas, providing Narcan distribution, resource materials, and one-on-one support
- Host quarterly workshops on topics including mental health & wellness, addiction as a disease, trauma-informed care, and harm reduction (minimum 4 workshops)
- Deliver presentations at schools, workplaces, and community organizations (target: bi-monthly, minimum 6 presentations)
- Collect participation data and feedback surveys at each event to assess reach and effectiveness

Outcome/Output Measures:

- Number of outreach events conducted (target: ≥ 12)
- Number of community members reached (target: $\geq 1,200$)
- Demographic data of participants (to ensure equity in reach)
- Number of Narcan kits distributed
- Number of referrals to recovery services
- Participant feedback scores on event quality and usefulness
- Pre/post event surveys showing increased knowledge about recovery resources

Goal #2: Launch Stigma-Reduction Campaign

SMART Goal Statement:

Release 3 stigma-reduction campaign messages through social media, flyers, and community platforms by June 30, 2026, informed by community survey data and tested through focus groups.

SMART Breakdown:

- Specific: Develop and release 3 stigma-reduction campaign messages using social media, flyers, and community platforms
- Measurable: 3 distinct campaign messages; 2 focus groups minimum; track reach, impressions, and engagement
- Achievable: SRC has established social media presence and community partnerships for message dissemination
- Relevant: Directly addresses community survey findings showing persistent stigma toward people who use drugs and those with mental illness
- Time-bound: By June 30, 2026

Objectives (Strategies):

- Analyze community survey data to determine campaign focus by December 15, 2025
- Develop 3 draft campaign messages and 3 potential graphic designs by February 1, 2026
- Conduct at least 2 focus groups (with minimum 20 total participants) by March 1, 2026, to test messages and graphics
- Finalize campaign design and messaging based on focus group feedback by March 15, 2026
- Release campaign messages monthly in April, May, and June 2026 through social media, websites, flyers, and partner organizations
- Plan for next round of messages (FY27) during Spring 2026 based on Year 1 feedback

Outcome/Output Measures:

- Number of campaign messages developed and released (target: 3)
- Number of graphic designs created (target: 3)
- Number of focus groups conducted (target: ≥2)
- Number of focus group participants (target: ≥20)
- Focus group feedback results and recommendations
- Social media reach (impressions, engagement, shares)
- Number of flyers distributed
- Post-campaign survey data on attitudes toward people who use drugs (compared to baseline community survey)

Goal #3: Strengthen Partnerships and Expand Council Membership

SMART Goal Statement:

Recruit 15 new council members representing diverse sectors (healthcare, law enforcement, faith-based, business, education, people with lived experience) and conduct quarterly in-person council meetings by June 30, 2026, to strengthen collaborative partnerships and expand recovery support infrastructure.

SMART Breakdown:

- Specific: Recruit 15 new members from diverse sectors; hold quarterly in-person council meetings
- Measurable: 15 new members; track sector representation; 4 quarterly meetings minimum; attendance tracked
- Achievable: SRC has existing relationships with Southland Human Services Leadership Council (90+ members) and extensive community connections
- Relevant: Addresses need for coordinated collaborative approach to recovery supports across sectors
- Time-bound: By June 30, 2026

Objectives (Strategies):

- Conduct sector gap analysis by January 15, 2026, identifying underrepresented areas (law enforcement, business, youth, older adults, LGBTQIA+ community)
- Develop targeted recruitment materials and outreach strategy by January 31, 2026
- Conduct one-on-one outreach to potential members through existing networks (minimum 30 contacts)

Objectives (Strategies) continued:

- Host quarterly in-person ROSC Council meetings (September, December, March, June) with structured agendas, clear roles, and action items
- Provide member orientation and engagement opportunities (committee participation, event volunteering)
- Track and maintain member database with contact information, sector representation, and engagement level

Outcome/Output Measures:

- Number of new members recruited (target: ≥15)
- Sector representation breakdown (healthcare, law enforcement, faith-based, business, education, lived experience, other)
- Number of quarterly meetings held (target: 4)
- Average meeting attendance rate
- Number of active committees formed
- Member satisfaction survey results
- Number of collaborative partnerships/MOUs established

FY27 Strategic Direction (3-Year Vision)

Building on FY26 progress, SRC envisions:

Sustained Stigma-Reduction Campaign:

Continue campaign with 6 stigma-reduction messages released yearly in FY27 and FY28 (every 2 months) through expanded platforms. Conduct at least 4 focus groups annually to test messages. Measure increases in community survey respondents indicating people who use substances deserve respect.

Expanded Community Presence:

Continue to host the annual in-person Recovery Conference. Increase monthly pop-ups to cover all priority communities. Develop speaker series featuring people in recovery, clinical experts, and community leaders.

Recovery Infrastructure Development:

Support establishment of additional Living Room recovery cafes and drop-in centers. Expand SRC's peer recovery support specialist workforce through training partnerships with UMARC. Develop recovery housing coalition to address safe, affordable housing gaps.

Equity and Access:

Launch targeted initiatives for underserved populations (BIPOC, youth, older adults, LGBTQIA+, justice-involved). Partner with transportation providers to address service access barriers. Create multilingual resources and culturally specific programming.

Sustainability:

Diversify funding through grants from United Way, LIUNA, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and other foundations. Build sustainable volunteer base. Develop earned income strategies to support long-term operations.



Conclusion

The Southland Recovery Coalition is committed to making recovery possible for all residents of south suburban Cook County and eastern Will County. Through strategic community engagement, stigma reduction, partnership building, and equity-focused programming, SRC will create a recovery-oriented system of care that honors all pathways to recovery and supports individuals, families, and communities affected by substance use and mental illness.

As we move forward with this strategic plan, we are guided by the wisdom of our community:

"Healing is an art. It takes time. It takes practice. It takes work. But, most importantly, it takes love."