



Task Force on Holistic and Effective Responses to Illicit Drug Use

Date: 02.12.2025

Open meeting law in-person location, staffing, and task force members in attendance:

Task Force members in attendance: Ryan Kelly, Barry Edwards, Lauren Graber, Shane Myre, Dziwe Ntaba, Bradley Ray, Donovan Sather, Bill Ward, Donald Lannoye, Alex Kraak, Jillian Dease, Phil Baebenroth

Absent: Chris Bates, Kurt DeVine

Design team: Jennifer Blanchard (OAR), Cat Rohde (OAR), Stephanie Klein (MAD), Abra Pollock (MAD), Ari Edelman-McHenry (Rise Research), Anne Siegler (Rise Research)

Other: David Zimmer, Juliana Milhofer

Agenda items

Welcome and roll call

- Members and observers were welcomed
 - Noted it was a working meeting with time held at the end for public comment, though public could observe and submit comments to the Office of Addiction and Recovery. Contact information was provided.
- Co-Chair Ryan provided opening thoughts.
 - Excited to hear input from the task force on the drug policing recommendations.
- **Roll call and introductions:** Roll call was taken
- **Review of agenda:** Agenda and objectives for the meeting were reviewed.
- **Approve of minutes:** Meeting notes for January were approved.

Report and recommendations status update

- The task force report is finalized and ready to go to the legislature. Dr. Kelly will submit.
- Shane – Now that the report is final, can we talk more about the process from the last meeting to the report being final?
- JMB – a vendor did the initial draft, it was shared with chairs, we then built upon the report, it was reviewed by MMB comms, then went through accessibility, was reviewed by GOV comms, and then

returned to MMB. Dr Kelly will submit. Members of task force were also invited to request a copy during the review process (none requested).

- The report is a living document and can be updated with the new recommendations. Anyone wanting to send a supplemental report to go with the new recommendations may do so.

Rise Research presentation: Drug Policing recommendations

- Rise Research presented on drug policing recommendations, including:
 - A review of where the drug policing recommendations sit in the context of our work
 - Drug policing is one piece of the puzzle. It relies on healthcare, harm reduction and social determinants
 - A review of methods used to formulate recommendations
 - We expect drug policing to be a controversial area.
 - We started from the initial report, took an assessment of MN specific policies for context (state laws, statutes), conducted key informant interviews, and research reports and literature from expert trusted groups.
 - When assessing MN policy context, we searched for specific phrases regarding drug use. That helped ID areas for reform.
 - Our sampling frame included people who had experience in all four domains and a variety of professional roles, as well as communities disproportionately impacted.
 - A review of drug policing recommendations
 - Recommendations are in two areas, decriminalization and concurrent change
 - Recommendations for MN include:
 - 1) Decriminalize the personal possession and use of drugs with no sanctions attached
 - a. Note: we found that the evidence was limited or mixed on the benefits of decriminalization.
 - b. Decriminalization cannot end an overdose, homelessness, or public behavioral health crisis
 - c. It can reduce people's contact with a criminal legal system, reduce racial disparities in the criminal legal system, and encourage people to seek treatment and harm reduction services.
 - 2) Create voluntary, community-based pathways to health, harm reduction, and social services for people who want them (i.e. Decriminalization with targeted diversion to health and social services)
- **Questions and answers included:**
 - Who was interviewed, how interviewees were identified, and confidentiality.
 - Use of AI in the analysis
 - The need to have treatment solutions in place, and time to implement them, prior to decriminalization
 - Consequences of misinterpretation of drug testing, and whether there are evidence-based drug test kits
 - Question of whether there is evidence that decriminalization, with needed supports in place, will allow law enforcement to focus on other areas.

Reflection and discussion on Rise Research presentation

Task Force members were given time for reflection on the Rise Research presentation and place comments in the Mural, followed by a round robin for each member to share their reactions to and reflections on what they heard.

- Task Force members input included:
 - Concerns about resource inequities between rural and urban counties
 - Similarity to prior recommendations in improving health and decreasing harm
 - Recognizing that decriminalization can't end drug overdoses or homelessness
 - Suggestion to pilot different responses in different counties to collect meaningful data, which other counties could consider in deciding on what actions to take
 - Concerns that some programs could appear to normalize illegal drug use, especially for youth
 - Acknowledging that "decriminalization" is a term with negative consequences
 - Penalizing people in their journey of use and addiction is not productive
 - Justice by geography and medical support by geography. Widely different responses in different counties. Mental health issues as well as addiction treatment issues
- Facilitator suggested members consider the elements within the drug policing recommendations that most directly address desired outcomes (of helping those most affected by drug addiction). Responses included:
 - Easier for many individuals to gain access to a drug dealer than medical care
 - Need to improve education.
 - Discussion of how medications for opioid use disorder are not the replacement of one addiction to another, but rather medically treating a chronic condition
 - Note that one element that would help is non-law enforcement assistance at the scene to offer help to those who could benefit from it.
 - Note that during the war on drugs, crime has gone up, so has drug use. We need to find a way to change the system that doesn't include incarceration.

Future meetings

- Co-chair noted that ideally, any recommendation would be passed at a 100%. If others don't feel the same way, how can get more information?
 - Question of whether to have a test vote without more detail and focus on the ones that members are unsure of.
 - Members responded that they would prefer to get information first, and increase understanding, before any test votes
 - Discussion of potential speakers who can share experiences of other locations: what they did, what went wrong, what went well, and any evidence
 - Suggestion that it would be helpful to hear law enforcement experiences

Public comment

No members of the public provided comment.

Next meeting and adjourn

- The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 12 and will be a fully virtual meeting.
- The Task Force adjourned at 12:00 p.m.