



Maryland's Office of Overdose Response

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Emily Keller, Special Secretary of Overdose Response

2026 Virtual Regional Opioid Restitution Fund Town Hall Series *August 4–6, 2026*

About the Town Hall Series

Between August 4–6, 2026, Maryland's Office of Overdose Response (MOOR) hosted a virtual town hall series on using prescription opioid settlement funds in Maryland. The series included five regional town halls to give Marylanders from across the state an opportunity to share their ideas for using these funds to meet unmet needs in their communities.

The feedback received through these town halls is summarized below, organized by region. Please contact MOOR with any questions at ORF.MOOR@maryland.gov.

Central Region: Tuesday, August 4, 2026

Baltimore City, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore County, Carroll County, Harford County, and Howard County

- **Recovery Housing:** Mike Elder, representing Donleigh House in Howard County, shared their experience with operating a recovery house for men. Elder reported a two-thirds success rate over 22 years and emphasized that the facility operates without external grants or tax credits.
- **Prenatal Opioid Exposure:** Grace Douglass, an epidemiologist and parent to children affected by prenatal opioid exposure, advocated for their inclusion in settlement spending. Douglass explained that these children often lack sufficient, ongoing therapeutic and behavioral health support after leaving the neonatal intensive care unit.
- **Peer Workforce:** Kaely Whittington, representing Honor of Maryland, discussed the need to expand the peer support workforce. Whittington noted that while Medicaid reimburses peer services, there is a barrier to entry regarding the requirement for 500 hours of supervised service before certification. Whittington proposed that the state incentivize organizations to hire peers during their training and certification phase to bridge this gap.
- **Youth Prevention:** Malhar Mandsaurwale, representing HC DrugFree, emphasized the necessity of investing in upstream prevention and early intervention for youth. Mandsaurwale shared that their own experience in the Teen Advisory Council provided the foundation for their career and

argued that prevention should focus on equipping young people with knowledge, confidence, and supportive relationships.

- **Fentanyl Awareness and Education:** Jackie Long spoke about the impact of illicit fentanyl poisoning and advocated for increased prevention and education, particularly within schools and athletic programs where injuries can lead to opioid dependency. Long also expressed a desire to connect with existing organizations to bring awareness programs into schools.
- **Recovery Community Organizations:** Rachel Pedersen, Harford County Center Manager for Voices of Hope, thanked MOOR leadership for supporting recovery community organizations. Pedersen highlighted that recovery is often impeded by practical barriers, such as a lack of transportation to job interviews, housing expenses, and the need for dental care, and stated that funding these needs helps individuals thrive in recovery.
- **Support for Children of Parents in Recovery:** Erica Hamlett, executive director of the SOAP, addressed the lack of support services specifically for children whose parents struggle with substance use. Hamlett argued that these children are often overlooked and proposed that support and services for them should be integrated directly into existing recovery and treatment programs.
- **Housing and Harm Reduction:** August Page, a social worker at Sparc Women's Center, advocated for more investment in supportive housing and low-barrier services for those experiencing homelessness and substance use issues. Page noted that daily survival needs often hinder engagement with treatment and that removing barriers such as the requirement for IDs or insurance would improve access to care.
- **Food Access and Harm Reduction Education:** Candy Kerr, representing the Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition, identified food insecurity as a primary issue for the population they serve and requested funding to provide hot meals. Kerr also recommended that high school education programs incorporate harm reduction-based practices rather than relying solely on past scare tactics to prevent overdoses.
- **Comprehensive Support Services:** Mohammad Ahmad, division director of the Gaudenzia, detailed their holistic approach to care. Ahmad explained that the program includes case management that helps clients obtain vital records, write resumes, and secure employment to foster long-term success. He reported that their agency provides free transportation services to remove barriers for individuals seeking treatment. The agency offers 24/7 admission and invites anyone in need of treatment to contact them.
- **Peer Centers and Post-Treatment Support:** Jimmy Gast, representing the Hoffa Foundation, suggested adding peer centers to the list of resources to provide places of healing outside of clinical settings. Gast noted that peer support is particularly effective post-treatment when options are limited, and individuals are transitioning to independent living.
- **Barriers to Crisis Response Access:** Jimmy Gast expressed frustration regarding the difficulty of accessing crisis response centers, specifically citing obstacles like complex application forms and residency requirements. Gast argued that during a crisis, staff should focus on assisting the individual where they are located at that moment rather than requiring them to complete forms or verify their county of residence.

- **Medicaid and Healthcare Sustainability:** Melissa Vail, from the Sinai Hospital Addictions Recovery Program, expressed significant concern regarding the future of Medicaid coverage for treatment. Reflecting on changes in the field since 1999, Vail warned that if individuals lose Medicaid and insurance coverage, there is a risk of a broader healthcare crisis beyond the existing opioid epidemic.
- **Family Support in Medical Emergencies:** Tiffinee Scott spoke as a parent to advocate for families navigating the loss of loved ones or medical emergencies, such as overdoses. Scott highlighted that families currently lack adequate support and often face law enforcement rather than care-focused professionals when a loved one experiences an overdose. Scott called for 24/7 peer support services that are available during emergencies and requested that funding be directed toward family support initiatives.

Capital Region: Wednesday, August 5, 2026

Frederick County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County

- **Sober Living Homes:** Alecia Lewis expressed challenges regarding the establishment of certified sober living homes, citing a long and difficult certification process. They requested guidance on navigating these bureaucratic processes and suggested that providers could offer subject matter expertise to help develop improved guidance.
- **Nonprofit Outreach:** Marcia Spencer introduced themselves as a representative of the Safe Exit Initiative, a nonprofit organization that supports vulnerable women experiencing addiction, homelessness, and human trafficking. Spencer explained that they joined the meeting to learn about the current processes and information regarding the fund.

Eastern Shore Region: Wednesday, August 5, 2026

Caroline County, Cecil County, Dorchester County, Kent County, Queen Anne's County, Somerset County, Talbot County, Wicomico County, and Worcester County

- **Recovery Works Berlin Presentation:** Sara Rose Gorfinkel and Debbie Smullen presented "Recovery Works Berlin," a program funded by the ORF that supports individuals in recovery by facilitating their reintegration into the workforce. The initiative provides seasonal employment in downtown beautification and park maintenance, including training and supervision. To date, the program has employed four individuals, two of whom have transitioned into full-time roles with the town.
- **Advocacy for Post-Overdose Family Support:** Catie C. advocated for the allocation of funding to support families impacted by an overdose. They proposed that the state provide resources for professional cleanup services following an overdose or death, noting that homes can become unsafe due to the presence of substances like transdermal fentanyl patches.
- **Advocacy for Non-Opioid Pain Relief Research:** Daniel Saragnese and Kelly Schulz advocated for investing in non-addictive, non-opioid pain therapies. They argued that funding research and development for these alternatives would help prevent opioid addiction by providing safe pain relief options.

- **Funding Inquiries – Facilities and Services:** Aaron Wright inquired about whether opioid restitution funds could cover "brick and mortar" expenses for services such as housing, transportation, and child care for pregnant and parenting individuals. MOOR explained that while the current NOFA allows for renovation costs to ensure facilities are up to code, capital expenses like purchasing buildings or land are generally excluded to prevent the risk of asset misuse.

Eastern Shore Region: Thursday, August 6, 2026

Calvert County, Charles County, and St. Mary's County

- No public comment provided.

Western Region: Thursday, August 6, 2026

Allegany County, Garrett County, and Washington County

- **Re-entry and Pre-trial Diversion:** Jim Murray of AHEC West noted the importance of the funds for re-entry and pre-trial diversion programs, emphasizing that local sheriff's departments require continued financial support to maintain these essential services.
- **Educational Outreach Resources:** Steve, a program coordinator at AHEC, requested recommendations for educational websites or research materials that their staff, who are supported by ORF grant funding, can use to enhance their outreach and educational efforts.
- **Arts Organization Eligibility:** Chris Brewer from the Washington County Arts Council inquired about the eligibility of arts organizations for ORF funding. MOOR clarified that funding must align with Exhibit E, and while the office is not personally familiar with the specific arts program mentioned, they suggested that if an arts activity is tied to an evidence-based prevention or therapeutic recovery model, it may be permissible.
- **Grant Cycle Consistency:** Melissa Clark expressed concerns regarding the difficulty of managing one-year grant cycles and advocated for two- to three-year grant windows to allow for more consistent program growth. MOOR clarified that while other competitive grants funded by MOOR are managed on a yearly basis due to budget cycles, the currently released ORF grant does feature a two-year budget.
- **Washington County Updates:** Maria provided an update on progress in Washington County, noting that the county is releasing notices of awards for programs within their established plan, such as support for community organizations focused on families and children. She encouraged attendees to consider creative ways to integrate arts into prevention programming and suggested monitoring community reinvestment funds, while also noting that the county is actively collaborating with the local health department and looking for opportunities to expand community awareness.

Written Comment Summary

In addition to providing comments during our town halls, Marylanders were also able to provide written comments to our office. This feedback is summarized below.

- **Support for Families and Children:** Advocates emphasize prioritizing family peer support and long-term services for children with prenatal opioid exposure. Requests include financial assistance for adoptive grandparents, statewide burial assistance for families grieving overdose losses, and professional post-overdose cleanup services to ensure home safety.
- **Recovery Housing:** There is an urgent call to invest in safe, affordable, and certified recovery housing. Feedback suggests providing scholarships for individuals unable to afford fees, supporting transitional housing, and simplifying the certification process for providers to expand capacity.
- **Peer Support Workforce:** Recommendations include funding scholarships for Peer Recovery Specialist certification and providing dedicated support for Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs). Peer support is viewed as essential for providing hope and practical navigation across all stages of the recovery journey.
- **Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention:** Feedback supports funding for naloxone training, safer supplies, and evidence-based innovative therapies like psychedelic-assisted research. Prevention efforts should focus on honest, trauma-informed education for youth and addressing the whole person, including dental care and food access.
- **Funding and Grant Processes:** Stakeholders advocate for multi-year grant cycles and advance payment models to support smaller, community-based nonprofits. There is a strong preference for prioritizing public and nonprofit entities over for-profit organizations to ensure funds effectively remediate the epidemic's harms.