

Governor's Commission on Alcohol and Other Drugs
Meeting Minutes 08/25/2023
9:30am- 11:30am
NH State House
Executive Council Chambers

Attendance: Steve Ahnen, James Boffetti, Glen Bullock, Alex Casale, Jen Doris, Annette Escalante, Jeff Fleischer, Traci Fowler, Katja Fox, Richard Frost, Keith Howard, Timothy Lena, David Mara, Matt McKenney, Robert Quinn, Pastor Kathie Saari, Seddon Savage, Patrick Tufts, Senator David Watters, Lori Weaver

Approval of Minutes (Vote), Patrick Tufts

Chairman Patrick Tufts greeted the commission members and called the meeting to order at 9:37 AM. He asked for a vote to approve the minutes from the June 23, 2023 meeting.

First: Jen Doris

Second: Annete Escalante

All in favor, no opposed, motion carries

Commissioner's Update, Lori Weaver: Lori Weaver provided a few updates. She posted an opening for the Deputy Commissioner position. On August 31st, there will be a groundbreaking on the new forensic psychiatric hospital in NH. Many are invited to the event and welcome to attend. On Sept 1st the department will officially launch Mission Zero, which is a plan to eliminate emergency department boarding of psychiatric patients by 2025. The launch is intended to be a simple way for people to understand its basic components, which involve both long-term and shorter-term projects. Lori added she was happy to have NH Hospital Association partner to help.

Lori also announced that there is a new DCYF director who joined on August 1st. Jeff Fleischer was asked to join the table with the commission, and said it was an honor to be there. He is impressed by what the commission has done over the last 7 years and is looking forward to making more positive changes.

Next, Ms. Weaver introduced Jenny O'Higgins, a policy analyst at DHHS, who presented on the Strong as Granite Campaign, which is a NH public awareness campaign for behavioral health promotion and access to services. Ms. O'Higgins works in legislation and policy change. She spoke about the need for a new Behavioral Health Awareness campaign. Access to crisis care is an integrated system, and this campaign reflects that. She added that her presentation was just a preview, and the campaign will officially launch on September 8th. The Suicide Council is hosting a press release for Suicide Awareness Month, after which, they will roll out social media posts, advertisements, a web page, a promotional toolkit, billboards, event marketing, and other materials into the community. The campaign has already created 3 billboards.

Interviews and focus groups included many organizations throughout the state, including CMHC's, NH peer support agencies, recovery centers, and treatment providers. Their group worked hard to understand the successful messaging guidelines put in place by experts, and developed a framework for successful, safe messaging in suicide prevention. The strategy involves using a positive narrative, safety,

and guidelines. The focus should be on using person-first language that destigmatizes the disease of addiction, promotes understanding and respect, and reflects the complexity of addiction. It is also important to avoid language that simplifies or sensationalizes addiction, is judgmental or accusatory, or suggests that addiction is a weakness or moral failing. Using judgement free, person-first language can change whether or not people access care.

This campaign is about finding strength, which is why the slogan “A Stronger You, A Stronger NH” was chosen. New Hampshire is also known as the Granite State. Granite is one of the hardest substances on earth and is a conglomerate of different types of stone coming together. Ms. O’Higgins emphasized that this campaign is aspirational and is about finding strength and help seeking. When individuals access care, it reduces the burden on health care and law enforcement while making the community stronger.

The campaign ads feature people from many demographics and from all different parts of the state. Its mission is to promote broad substance use and mental health awareness, decrease stigma, and normalize help-seeking. Different ads, imagery, and messaging are targeted towards particular audiences. The ads are based on research of demographics, drug overdoses, and other data, with the message being that getting help is the strong thing to do. Some examples of social media ads show several different calls to action, like how to access 211 or Doorways. There is also downloadable content that people can use on their own. Demographic research will be provided to help show which audiences each ad targets. An example of a target audience would be females ages 30-40.

Annette Escalante asked how they plan to address non-English speakers. Ms. O’Higgins said they are working on this with the office of health equity and looking at the top languages in the state. There are also a number of cultural brokers throughout the community who can be utilized to help.

A member of the public asked if more billboards were coming. Ms. O’Higgins said yes, more is coming. She added that every time they preview the ads with providers and clients, they get more ideas, such as putting posters in patient rooms. Another member of the public, Keith Howard, asked about negative or misleading experiences with 211, and asked what we can do about this. For instance, there have been people who say they reached out for the first time and were told to go to a place that has been closed.

Ms. O’Higgins said it is a work in progress, and while there are times across the board that a person might not have a good experience, all of the partners she has worked with are open to feedback and want to make improvements. A member of the public asked if demographic information will be publicly available. Ms. O’Higgins said that it will. Patrick thanked Jenny for her well-done presentation.

Director’s Update: Katja Fox

Katja Fox stepped up to speak about some personnel changes, adding that the new Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Chief, Jill Burke, was here on her first official day of the role. She also added that Julianne Carbin was promoted, and her former role is now posted and open to applications. Ms. Fox said she is excited to build up the team and have some structure as we look at everything Ms. Weaver detailed, along with the scope and complexity of the work we do.

Next, she moved on to the dashboard, highlighting that two items were approved using Governor’s Commission funding. The first, Line 33, is for Physical Fitness and Equipment access for the military. This was put in place by the Granite YMCA to benefit military members and veterans. In addition, line 39 allocates \$400,000 to harm reduction efforts.

The state opioid response funding includes permission to purchase 6,000 Naloxone kits, and this is the first time such a purchase has been approved. These funds need to be used by the end of September, so there will soon be a reinfusion of available kits. The front page of the dashboard for Fiscal Year 2024 shows a remaining unencumbered, unallocated balance of \$2.6 million, so there will be a discussion about funding allocations. Patrick added that while \$2 million is available and uncommitted, he knows the budget task force is gearing up to make recommendations for next year. He congratulated all the folks taking on their new responsibilities and opened the meeting up to public comment.

Patrick O'Keefe, who works in community outreach, said he is happy to sit and talk with anyone in the room who is interested in knowing more about statistics and data, adding that education is key. Another member of the public said that NH Behavioral Health Summit opened NHBHS.com for registration.

Several events will be taking place this September in honor of National Recovery Month. Among them, the Hope for NH Recovery Festival will be held on September 30th at Arms park in Manchester, from 11am-2pm. The SOS 5th Annual Recovery Rally will be held on September 9th from 11am-3pm in Dover at Henry Law Park. A detailed calendar of events can be found online.

Chair's Update, Patrick Tufts

Patrick was asked by numerous elected officials over the last couple of months to render advice and opinion on the definition of "harm reduction." After several conversations with different people about how to reduce stigma, he has decided to form a short-term work group to address the subject, having already reached out to some members at the table. He will be reaching out to members of the public as well, and emphasized that he does not take this on lightly. The group will give an opinion, and while it won't be the end all be all, it will hopefully help elected officials as they move forward to make some difficult decisions. The timeline is to have an opinion by January. Members of the commission who are interested in participating should let Patrick know by email. He anticipates 3-4 meetings with some virtual work back and forth, and pointed out that this is a work group, not a standing committee.

Senator Watters chimed in that he appreciates Chairman Tuft's take on this. Many of these very fundamental questions came out of Senate Bill 239, which they will be meeting on in September.

Patrick stated that all elected officials who have approached him have said they are open to being educated on the topic. Part of the exercise will be to bring in content experts to educate all of us. A formal timeline will be sent out in the next week with more hard deadlines and information.

Public Comments

Lauren McGinley, of NH Harm Reduction Coalition said she is overjoyed that these conversations continue to happen and is happy to hear "harm reduction" said out loud. She added that NH Harm Reduction Coalition has active syringe programs, as well as an education department within the coalition. People can have 1:1's, lunch sessions, etc. to ask any questions, and can email Info@nhnrc.org to make an appointment.

Kate Fry, another member of the public, asked if we will also be having conversations about defining recovery, addiction, etc. She warns that we should be careful about defining and be open to those definitions evolving and changing.

Senator Watters said there have been conversations about potential changes in the federal funding formula and asked for an update on that. Patrick said he has not been given any updates yet.

Task Force Updates: Budget, Matt McKenny and Traci Fowler

Traci Fowler and Matt McKenny announced that they have a solid recommendation they would like commission consideration on, and which Patrick is seeking endorsement by vote on. The Task Force is charged with outlining a road map for how they are going to be making and monitoring the budget recommendations. Traci stated that we have a solid budget in place, and they are looking to gather public input for fiscal year 2025 (7/1/24 - 6/30/25.) Every December this commission makes recommendations for the following fiscal year, and December is right around the corner.

Traci stressed that they don't want to recreate the wheel. She has confidence in the Strategic Plan, which was driven by community input and can be downloaded on the website with more than 50 strategies outlined. The aim is to have a structure in place to check in on needs and gaps by continuing to open it up to stakeholder and community input. In an effort to not be burdensome, their recommendations are a simple online form that folks from any area in the state can access to add their input. In addition to the form, they would like to hold a public hearing asking for a quick pass on where folks are seeing gaps.

Ideally, they would like to start collecting input in September, then work the process through October and November so that by December, they are feeling confident about having a well-informed slate of recommendations. There are a lot of connections with the Opioid Abatement Commission, so there is a tremendous partnership that's in place. They will be looking at needs first, then funding stream second.

The Center for Excellence is working on a crosswalk, which is still being finalized. The crosswalk document is a tool that will help us, along with the Opioid Abatement Commission, to look at what is being funded, where there are gaps, and where dollars can be redeployed more effectively. All of these tools will help formulate the budget. Chairman Tufts commended the budget task force for bringing this forward, as they must have their recommendations to this commission by December and January in order to have those contracts in by July. They would like to make recommendations based on the task force and including public comment. The intent of restructuring the task force was to create a more transparent process, and this is part of that. Patrick thanked DHHS for their help and asked if the recommendation is that the three task forces do this all at the same time. He would like the other task forces to be involved. Traci said it would be a collective effort.

Dr. Seddon Savage asked what they are asking the public to respond to online. Traci explained that is what they hope to work with the task forces on, by looking at the state plan and identifying where there are needs and gaps in the work that is being funded.

Traci added that the first step is to increase awareness of the state plan. The second is checking in on needs and gaps. It is important to always keep the strategic plan as the rollback and understand that is where we need to lean in. Matt thanked the Task Force, whose hard work has been critical. Sgt. Richard Frost said he wanted to emphasize that he is very excited about the public input, not just people who are members of the task force, but the true public. Chairman Tufts asked to put this matter to a vote.

First: Timothy Lena

Second: Annette Escalante

All in favor. No opposed or abstained. Motion carries.

Dr. Savage met with the Data Task Force on August 1st, where the primary charges of the commission were optimizing metrics and identifying emergent trends in the state. They needed to know what data capacity there is in the state in order to have a good idea of what may be missing. The first step is to do an inventory of what is out there. There were several presentations at the meeting from different agencies including DHHS, The Department of Corrections, and the Department of Safety, who prepared 7 short reports on different data sets. One item the task force has identified is to consider whether we should be measuring strategies that result in including outcomes.

Steve Ahnen said he met a few times with a group who is very interested in the conversation around harm reduction. They also talked about how to coordinate their work with other task forces, and about creating a framework around making recommendations to other task forces.

Patrick thanked the task force chairs and asked for any other business. Dr. Savage said that people around the table might have knowledge that could be of interest. For example, perhaps the Department of Education has a new program or event or is doing good work that could be shared. Patrick said any members of the commission are invited to send him information they would like included in the packet.

Traci announced that she has copies of the Care at the Crossroads full report from the June meeting, and if anyone would like them to please feel free to take them. It provides something to keep us oriented to some of the financial and structural ways that dollars are moving around. She added that members of the public are welcome to take them as well.

Steve Ahnen asked if we will we have access to the slides as well. Patrick said they will be included in the minutes. Jenny added that we can put it out there, but it is up to Ms. Weaver, who said it is fine to distribute it and also to include it in the minutes. Patrick thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting at 10:44am.