



From the desk of County Manager Ryan Barrett

TO: Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
FROM: County Manager Ryan Barrett and Budget and Risk Director Becky Butler
DATE: November 27, 2024
SUBJECT: Opioid Settlement Funds – Sheriff’s Enforcement Team (SET)

The opioid epidemic has caused profound challenges in our community, including an increase in opioid-related criminal activity, overdose incidents, and the need for law enforcement resources to combat these issues. Under the One Washington Memorandum of Understanding, funds from opioid settlements are designated to address and mitigate the effects of the opioid crisis.

This memo outlines the justification for using opioid settlement funds to support current and future law enforcement expenditures directly related to the opioid epidemic. The proposed use of the funds is outlined in the attached memo from the Sheriff’s Office. The use of the opioid settlement funds for the SET is eligible, as reviewed by the County Manager, Budget and Risk Director, and the Chief Accountant.

The One WA MOU permits the use of opioid settlement funds for activities that address the opioid crisis, including those involving law enforcement.

Specifically, the MOU emphasizes funding strategies that:

1. Support current and future law enforcement expenditures relating to the opioid epidemic.
2. Educate law enforcement or other first responders regarding appropriate practices and precautions when dealing with fentanyl or other drugs.
3. Prevent and respond to opioid-related incidents.
4. Support the coordination and training of first responders.
5. Enhance community safety through targeted interventions.
6. Increase availability and distribution of naloxone and other drugs that treat overdoses for first responders, overdose patients, opioid users, families and friends of opioid users, schools, community navigators and outreach workers, drug offenders upon release from jail/prison, or other members of the general public.

Using the settlement funds for law enforcement activities aligns with these goals by directly addressing opioid-related criminal activity and public health challenges.



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LEWIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S ENFORCEMENT TEAM

The Benefits of Having a Lewis County Sheriff's Enforcement Team to Combat the Opioid Epidemic:

The opioid epidemic is one of the most pressing public health crises facing communities across the United States. It has led to a surge in overdose deaths and increased criminal activity, as well as straining on our healthcare systems. The Lewis County Sheriff's Enforcement Team plays a vital role in combating this epidemic, benefiting both public safety and community health. The current Sheriff's Enforcement Team, which was created on September 1, 2024, is comprised of (1) one sergeant and (2) two deputies – one of which being a K-9 deputy whose K-9 partner Kimbo is cross trained in apprehension and the detection of narcotics. Below are the key advantages of having a dedicated law enforcement unit focused on addressing opioid-related crime:

1. Targeting Drug Trafficking Networks:

Our Sheriff's Enforcement Team disrupts and dismantles opioid trafficking organizations that supply drugs like fentanyl and heroin to local communities. By targeting these networks, the Lewis County Sheriff's Office reduces the availability of illegal opioids on the streets. Fewer drugs in circulation leads to a decrease in overdose deaths and drug-related violence, which contributes to a safer environment for community members.

2. Reducing Drug-Related Crime:

Opioid addiction often leads to an increase in property crimes, thefts, and violent offenses as individuals struggle to feed their addiction. Our team directly addresses these criminal activities by removing drug dealers and repeat offenders from the streets. This reduces the frequency of crimes linked to substance abuse and helps restore a sense of safety and well-being to neighborhoods. The Sheriff's Enforcement Team collaborates with law enforcement partners including the DEA, US Marshals, Lewis County Jail, JNET and the FBI, as well as other local agencies and community partners such as Fire and EMS, to fight the opioid epidemic in Lewis County.

3. Public Education and Prevention:

Our Sheriff's Enforcement Team engages in educational outreach and public talks to raise awareness about the dangers of opioid use as well as prevention methods. Through community programs, schools, and local organizations, deputies distribute critical information about the signs of addiction, safe prescription practices, and the importance of naloxone (Narcan) for reversing opioid overdoses.

4. Building Trust Between Law Enforcement and the Lewis County Community:

The Sheriff's Enforcement Team focuses on addressing the opioid epidemic, building trust and collaboration between law enforcement and communities affected by drug addiction. By focusing on rehabilitation, prevention, and health outcomes, the Lewis County Sheriff's Office is improving its relationship with community members who may be wary of traditional law enforcement tactics. Trust in law enforcement encourages the public to report drug trafficking, overdose situations, and other opioid-related crimes, further strengthening efforts to combat the epidemic.

Conclusion:

The opioid epidemic is a multifaceted crisis that requires a multi-pronged approach, including the involvement of law enforcement, health professionals, and community organizations. A dedicated Sheriff's Enforcement Team will continue to combat opioid-related crime, reduce overdose deaths, support addiction recovery, and enhance public health and safety. By focusing not only on criminal enforcement but also on rehabilitation and prevention, this team offers a balanced solution that benefits both public safety and community health. Investing in such a specialized team is an essential step in reversing the devastating impact of the opioid epidemic on our communities in Lewis County. In the short time this team was formed, they have seized over 5,000 fentanyl pills and 8,454 kilograms of powdered fentanyl. They are currently working two fentanyl overdose cases and are actively pursuing multiple subjects for large quantities of fentanyl for distribution. The team, with K-9 Kimbo, also continues to conduct routine narcotics sniffs in our local jail.

Lewis County Sheriff's Office Mission Statement:

Being a committed community partner, providing professional service to enhance the safety, security, and quality of life in Lewis County.