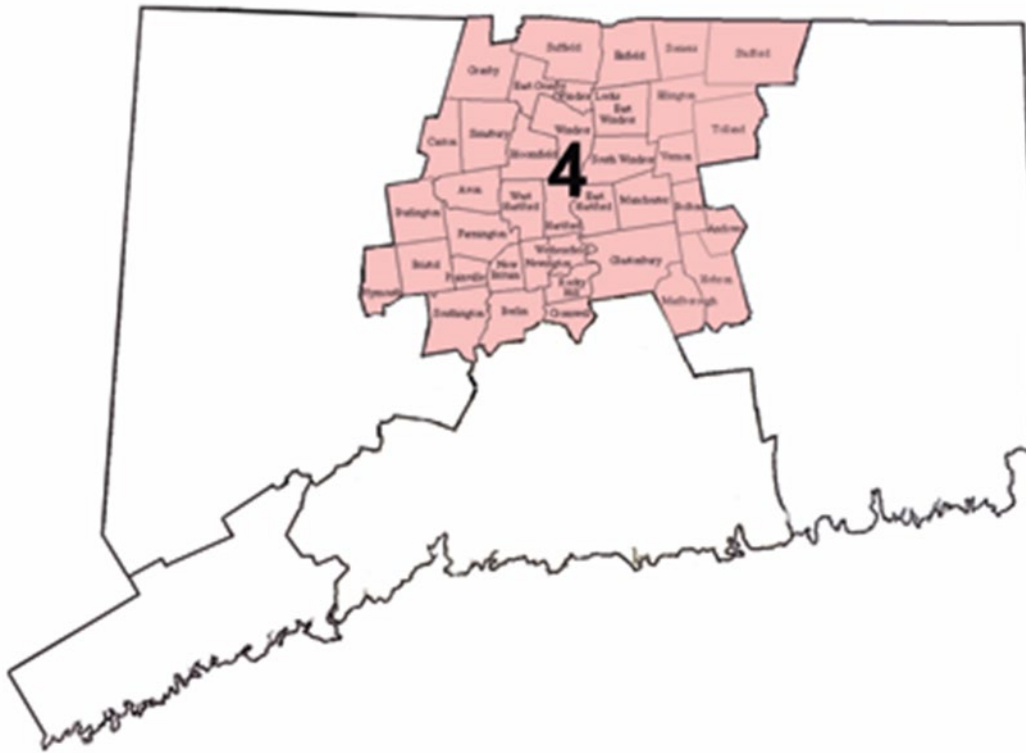


REGION IV PRIORITIES REPORT

UPDATES TO PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED IN 2019



Submitted by
Amplify, Inc.
June 30, 2020

Explosion in use of electronic nicotine devices (ENDs) Same. Continues to be a priority issue of concern.

- Previous years' surveys may not have accurately reflect use, however one of our recent school youth surveys (Enfield) reflected an 165% increase in use by students grades 6-8 from 2017. It is hoped that tobacco 21 legislation will help deter access for youth.
- Of concern is that the most frequently product used with e-cigarettes was marijuana/cannabis.
- LPC personnel indicate vaping issues are being at least moderately addressed in their communities.
- Vaping has been chosen by CT as the priority issue to be address with LPC mini-grant funds in 2020.

Overdose (OD) deaths caused by use of substances laced with Fentanyl. Worse. OD rates continue to climb.

- Reports from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner show polysubstance use, the presence of Fentanyl, and now Xylazine, as primary factors leading to the high numbers of accidental overdose. Hartford had the highest number of opioid-related deaths. See link to April 2020 DPH Drug Overdose report: <https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:1d51399e-fcaa-4143-b1b9-ac434033a673>. According to 2019 regional data, an equal number of Black and Hispanic individuals are dying as Non-Hispanic Caucasians if numbers are considered as percentage of population vs. raw numbers.
- Increase is in spite of efforts of the state, provider community, prevention coalitions and municipalities to provide education, treatment resources, and support. Stay at home restrictions imposed by the CoVid19 pandemic may be contributing to this rise and to individuals' reluctance to seek treatment.
- In person educational and distribution forums had to be cancelled due to social distancing requirements.
- Surveyed CAC and LPC members indicate the issue is being moderately addressed in their communities.
- Several Communities have increased their commitment of effort and resources for recovery from substance abuse and have identified themselves as "Recovery Friendly Communities." Amplify will continue to promote using mini-grant funds and to promote a Recovery Friendly Workplace toolkit being under development by the ADPC Prevention Subcommittee.

High rates of anxiety among youth. Some progress as the issue is receiving greater attention.

- As recommended by the Priority Needs Workgroup, questions related to youth anxiety have been added to school youth surveys being conducted this year. CAC and LPC members indicate the issue is being addressed in their communities at least to a moderate degree.
- Amplify chose youth anxiety as its topic of focused study this year. Focus groups and surveys are being conducted with report due by the end of summer 2020. Unfortunately, results may be biased as a result of the CoVid19 crisis, i.e. social isolation, family dynamics, and pressures of distance learning.
- Use of Gizmo curriculum by some school districts noted as a strength in CAC and LPC member surveys. <https://www.preventsuicidect.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/08/GizmoPawesome.pdf>
- Two school survey evaluators have integrated anxiety indicators into their student substance use survey. For both this has included a review of the association between anxiety (and other mental health) indicators and substance use. This is an important case to make because, although CT is committed to an integrated approach to behavioral health (including physical and mental health and addiction), Federal funding is becoming more siloed, not necessarily acknowledging mental health promotion as a primary prevention strategy for addressing substance abuse.

Overlap between computer gaming, sports betting and problem gambling – Same.

- There continues to be a lack of awareness among Catchment Area Council and Local Prevention Coalitions, and the general public about problem gambling, including the association of computer gaming as a form of gambling.

- Several youth groups developed PSAs this year about computer gaming, however the PAWs (Peers Are Wonderful Support) conference, where some of these were to be unveiled, had to be cancelled due to CoVid-19. We are working with the Ct Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG) on a marketing campaign to share the PSAs developed by students across the state.
- Also cancelled were presentations by members of the Regional Gambling Awareness Team at April Catchment Area Council meetings.
- We have had difficulty, despite intensive outreach, signing up church or community groups for the 6-hour Congregation/Community Assistance Program (CAP) about gambling, addiction, suicide and mental health. A shortened and revised version of this program is being piloted.
- Six forums were held by the Asian American Pacific Islanders Ambassadors community conversations. Use of the film Paulina and a financial literacy curriculum have been effective outreach tools.

Concern over loss of Catchment Area Council (CAC) consumer engagement & monitoring roles in new RBHAO structure – Better.

- Amplify secured grant funding from the Catholic Social Justice Ministry of the Archdiocese of Hartford to maintain support for the CACs. This was followed by additional funding from DMHAS for this purpose.
- CAC meeting agendas were organized around priorities identified in the 2019 Priorities and Recommendations report with some Regional Forums offering topics of interest to both Catchment Area and Local Prevention Council members.
- Amplify engaged 3 persons with lived experience to act as CAC facilitators. Their involvement has enriched meeting discussions and relationships with CAC members. This has become more important since the advent of social isolation due to CoVid19. Many of our members do not have access to Wi-Fi outside of their local library or clubhouse. Weekly phone calls from the facilitators have allowed them to stay connected and provide feedback on critical issues.

Safe, affordable, supportive housing and residential services – Worse. Lack of resources for housing and residential care continues to be a top priority area of concern.

- Up until March of this year, feedback from CAC, LPC, and community groups indicated concern were about the same as in 2019. However, the CoVid19 pandemic has added to the problem as 2-1-1 is overwhelmed with calls about CoVid19 resources, shelters have reduced capacity to improve social distancing, and growing unemployment (and inability to pay rent) presents risk of eviction for a large number of people currently in housing.
- Amplify is partnering with other housing advocates to seek additional resources and improved collaboration to address these concerns.

Treatment priorities: outpatient treatment, crisis response, navigation assistance, warm hand-off between levels of care inpatient rehabilitation, integrated medical and behavioral health care, and the need for more prescribers, staff turnover, transportation (especially in rural areas), lack of options for detoxification– Same.

- In spite of the social isolation imposed by CoVid19, some improvements have been identified in outpatient treatment due to relaxed rules and available funding for telehealth services. Providers report a decrease in no-show appointments and a new ability to view the individuals in their home environment. Individuals in recovery report less frustration over transportation barriers. Individuals seeking Methadone treatment are less dissuaded by having to stand in line daily at a facility. Both individuals and providers alike indicate they hope some of the positive experiences by a forced reliance on telehealth are not sacrificed if and when things return to “normal.”

- Inadequate crisis response (limited hours, focus on assessment for hospitalization) is an ongoing concern. A new central call center for adult crisis response is anticipated for July 1, 2020 along with learning collaborative established for adult mobile crisis responders. Progress for both has been slowed by the need to maintain social distance whenever possible. In spite of efforts on the part of DMHAS, Amplify staff and other community partners over the past 3 years, much of the responsibility for responding to individuals with serious emotional distress is still left to law enforcement (people in uniform who carry tasers and guns).
- May 2020 Data screening data from Mental Health America points to a significant increase in depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide or self-harm as a result of the CoVid19 epidemic. <https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus%20Mental%20Health%20Presentation%206-1-2020.pdf>.
- Most recently three North Central CT LMHAs received SAMHSA grants to enhance their service offerings, including integrated medical and behavioral health care, mobile crisis and medication assisted treatment.
- Culturally responsive treatment is still a priority, especially in light of events of police and other violence against individuals of color in our communities. Amplify staff, in collaboration with the Office of Healthcare Strategy conducted listening sessions on this topic in January, 2020. Mistrust of the healthcare system, cultural competence, and language barriers were of primary concern. Again, as we look at the impact of the CoVid10 pandemic, we see more deaths, unemployment, and basic needs issues affecting communities of color. All of these issues impact mental health. Amplify is collaborating with the CT Ministerial Health Fellowship and the UConn Health Disparities Institute for a community dialogue on these issues on 6/24 and 7/1. <https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:e34cb986-f021-40eb-a42c-8e53902563df>

Recovery support priorities: case management and community support services, housing, respite, crisis response, transportation, family and peer support, and marketing of peer support options – Same - All continue to be priorities.

- Non-emergency medical transportation has been particularly challenging over the past year with many reports of late arrivals or no-shows from Veyo drivers. Amplify Mobility Management staff continues to provide advocacy and monitor closely referring complaints to the legislative committee overseeing the Veyo contract. As mentioned above, one of the positive outcomes of the CoVid19 pandemic was a relaxation of rules and available funding for telehealth services. As a result, some of the transportation barriers for treatment services have been removed.
- DCF has increased options for family support through a contract with Beacon for intensive case management services through their Volunteer Care Management Program.
- A workgroup was in process of formation for establishing peer support specialist certification before the legislative session ended prematurely due to CoVid19. Hopefully this work will start up again for the 2021 Legislative Session.