

Report to the Legislature

DOH Opioid Overdose Prevention Campaigns

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For more information or additional copies of this report:

Center for Health Promotion & Education

Office of Public Affairs & Equity

243 Israel Rd. S.E.

Tumwater, WA 98501

Report Authors

Chantel Wang

Opioid Health Educator

Center for Health Promotion & Education

Office of Public Affairs & Equity

Washington State Department of Health

Chantel.Wang@doh.wa.gov

Contents

- Executive Summary..... 1
- Campaign development, implementation and metrics 3
 - Adult Campaign (May 26-July 13 2025) 3
 - Table 1: Campaign metrics (Adult) May 26-July 5 2025 5
 - Youth Campaign (May 26-June 30, 2025)..... 6
 - Table 2: Campaign metrics (Youth) May 26-June 30 2025 8
- Recommendations 10
- Conclusion..... 11
- Appendix A: Glossary of Terms 12



Executive Summary

Opioids—including prescription pain medication, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl—are causing a serious public health and community crisis across the nation. Washington state has continued to experience an increase in overdose deaths since 2020, mainly driven by fentanyl. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) supports overdose prevention and response efforts for all people across Washington, including those outlined in this report.

In accordance with the 2024 Engrossed Senate Bill 5906, Substitute House Bill 2396, and Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1956, DOH was charged with developing, implementing, and maintaining a statewide drug overdose prevention and awareness campaign. The campaign was directed to educate the public about the dangers of methamphetamines and opioids, including fentanyl, and the harm caused by substance use. This includes the risk of a contaminated drug supply with synthetic opioids, and that even trace amounts of synthetic opioids can be lethal. The campaign was also required to include outreach to both youth and adults focused on preventing substance use and overdose deaths.

In 2025, the Washington State DOH contracted with the marketing agency C+C to develop two statewide overdose prevention campaigns. Following the social marketing best practice of specifying an audience for a campaign, the two campaigns were divided by the required audiences. One campaign focused on adults and the other on youth. Although the campaigns were specific for each audience, both live under the PreventOverdoseWA umbrella campaign, created in 2023. The original PreventOverdoseWA campaign was created with a broad scope in mind to ensure we would be able to add in new messaging, anticipating the drug landscape will change over time.

This report will highlight how these campaigns fulfill statutory requirements. Our campaigns aim to reduce death from overdose, so they address the needs of people at highest risk of overdose—those who use fentanyl and other substances. Our campaigns are informed by evidence-based strategies to reach people who use drugs, drawing from the principles of harm reduction. Messaging addresses how people can reduce the risks associated with substance use without requiring abstinence. This approach acknowledges that substance use can begin from a multitude of systemic and social reasons, and it is important to meet people where they are, in case they are not ready or do not have the support to seek treatment.

Most of the fatal overdoses in Washington occur among those who are already using substances. The adult campaign focuses on people who use non-prescribed opioids and their care networks (friends, family, etc.) to provide education on the potential risks caused by substance use, specifically overdose. For adults, many people use alone or do not have naloxone with them due to many systemic and social factors. This leads to an increased risk of overdose. This campaign works to communicate the ways one can be safe and reduce the number of fatal overdoses, such as promoting the importance of carrying naloxone with tips on

where to get it, empowering people to learn the signs of an overdose, information on fentanyl test strips to know what you are using, etc.

The youth campaign focuses on the risk of fentanyl itself and the unpredictability of the drug supply. Even though fewer teens today are using substances, opioid-related deaths have tripled in Washington youth over the last few years. This campaign brings awareness of the contaminated drug supply while focusing on the dangers of buying through social media, and highlights that even trace amounts of fentanyl can be deadly since it is odorless and tasteless.

The reporting for both campaigns is still underway; however, the preliminary data shows that these campaigns were successful at engaging and reaching the priority audiences. Once the reporting is completed, further insight regarding the successful promotion of behavior change and perception will be available.

Campaign development, implementation and metrics

Adult Campaign (May 26-July 13, 2025)

The adult campaign prioritized individuals aged 25-64 who use opioids, with the goal of encouraging the most impactful safer use behaviors to reduce overdose deaths: carrying naloxone and using around people you feel safe with and trust. It encourages people who use drugs (PWUD) to think ahead and increase their confidence of how to stay safe in case something, like an overdose, happens. The main audience takeaway from this campaign is that preventing an opioid overdose takes teamwork. Having someone you trust to do things like carry or administer naloxone or call for help could save your life or the life of someone you care about.

The team conducted both secondary (literature review and landscape analysis) and primary (interviews with subject matter experts and the priority audiences, as well as concept/message testing) research to assess:

- Audience awareness of harm reduction behaviors, by gaining a better understanding experience, as well as barriers and motivators, for three priority behaviors: carrying naloxone, not using alone, and knowing the signs of an opioid overdose
- Sentiment toward campaign messages, such as testing the "make a plan" messaging in terms of relevance, believability, and motivation
- Evaluation of similar campaigns in other states

This research, combined with WA specific overdose death certificate data, informed what audiences were prioritized (who is at a disproportionate risk) as well as what harm reduction and messages were chosen, as shown in the diagram below.

Research found that the frequency of carrying naloxone has increased from 2023, however it still remains relatively rare. The main reason participants keep naloxone on hand while using is preparedness, ensuring it's available in case of an overdose. Research participants cited personal experiences with overdoses (themselves or others) as a key motivator for keeping naloxone on hand. Lack of access to naloxone, however, is the main reason participants have not had it with them when using.

When using opioids, most participants report that they are only sometimes with other people – only a small number report they are always around others when using. Most use with other people who use such as friends or a spouse/partner to share, out of convenience, for social reasons, and/or for safety or overdose prevention.

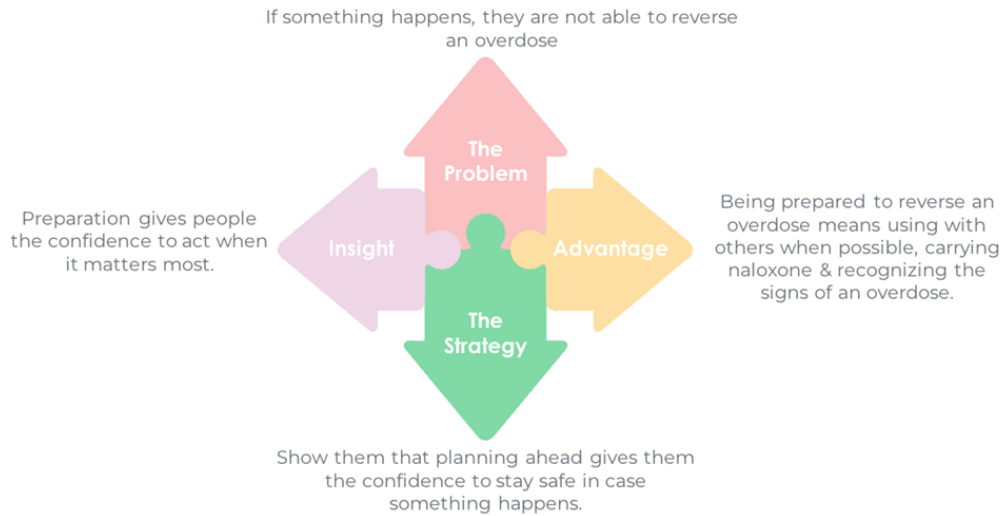


Figure 1: Strategic framework for the adult people who use opioids campaign, based on survey research the WA DOH conducted.

Audiences that were prioritized include adults who use non-prescribed opioids, ages 25-64 with a male skew, unhoused communities, and 10 priority counties in Washington that had the highest rates of overdose: Whatcom, Clallam, King, Grays Harbor, Mason, Thurston, Lewis, Pierce, Spokane, and Pend Oreille.

The campaign features assets in English and Spanish, including:

- **Social media static graphics** and accompanying copy running via Meta platforms (Instagram and Facebook)
- **30-second video** running on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Digital Pre-Roll, Digital OTT, and traditional broadcast TV
- **30-second audio spot** running on traditional and digital radio
- **Banners ads** running on mobile devices (phones and tablets)
- **Posters** in areas where unhoused populations are higher
- **Campaign webpage** that features graphics and information written for the audience, and a new Safety Tips webpage support the campaign goal.

Banner Ads: A banner ad is a rectangular ad that shows up on a website, usually at the top of the page.

Broadcast TV: "Broadcast TV" means placing ads on traditional TV networks.

Broadcast Radio: Ads played on regular radio stations.

Digital Audio: Digital audio advertising is when brands use ads in things like podcasts, music streaming, or online radio to reach people.

Digital TV/OTT: "Digital TV" or "OTT" (Over-the-Top) refers to ads shown on streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime Video.

Digital Video Pre-Roll: A "Digital Video Pre-Roll" is a short video ad that plays before the main video a user wants to watch on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, or websites.

Static Ads: Static ads are ads that don't change or move.



Figure 2: Examples of the adult people who use opioids campaign static ads, in English and Spanish.

The advertisements were used to promote the behavior changes of carrying naloxone and using around others whom you feel safe and trust. The advertisements promote these two behaviors and encourage people to visit our website for more in-depth information on how to recognize signs of an overdose, where to get naloxone, how to use naloxone, and how to keep yourself safe either by yourself or with others that you trust.

With this, we aimed to increase the number of people who use opioids carrying naloxone, encourage/empower them to not use alone (if you are experiencing an overdose you are unable to administer naloxone on yourself or call for help), increase the number of people who know the signs of an overdose, and increase awareness of harm reduction strategies when using alone.

Table 1: Campaign metrics (Adult) May 26-July 5 2025

Reach	Impressions	Link clicks	Video plays
6,182,584	59,443,360	131,331	18,027,864

Reach: How many unique users saw the content.

Impressions: Total number of views (including multiple views from the same people)

Engagement (reactions, shares, link clicks, video plays): the total number of times users interacted with the content.

** Washington's population in 2025 was estimated to be 8.1 million.*

The chosen concept, "Teamwork," was concept-tested with the priority audience before launching the campaign. Results showed that the campaign illustrated the humanity of people who have survived an opioid overdose and evoked feelings of gratitude and hope among people who use opioids.

The campaign wrapped on July 13th, 2025, and a full analysis report will be created on the metrics from this campaign to assess overall success. The data above demonstrate that the campaign was successful at engaging and reaching the audience. An ad recall and awareness survey performed after the campaign will evaluate how well audiences remember and resonate with the advertisement after being exposed to it. This survey will give us further insight into the success of promoting behavior change and change in perception. These details can be provided once the full report is complete.

Youth Campaign (May 26-June 30, 2025)

Youth populations are at a high risk of opioid overdose, as they are unaware of the widespread fentanyl use in counterfeit pills and other drugs. They also have limited knowledge regarding how and where to access naloxone, a life-saving overdose treatment medication. The goal of this campaign was to increase awareness of fentanyl exposure from counterfeit pills and other drug forms and increase knowledge and use of naloxone in youth ages 14-18 in Washington.

This campaign was informed by primary research, including interviews and message and concept testing with subject matter experts and youth focus groups. The research purpose was to:

- Assess baseline awareness of the current opioid landscape
- Understand the audience's attitudes and beliefs about the current opioid landscape

Among youth audiences, there was mixed awareness about contamination of drugs and counterfeit pills, an understanding of what naloxone is but not how to use or acquire it, and a belief that an overdose happens to others, not themselves. A significant number of high school and college students purchase drugs and pills on social media or the dark web, believing them to be authentic oxycodone, Adderall, Xanax, or other medicines.

This research informed the messaging and strategy of this campaign framework, as shown below.

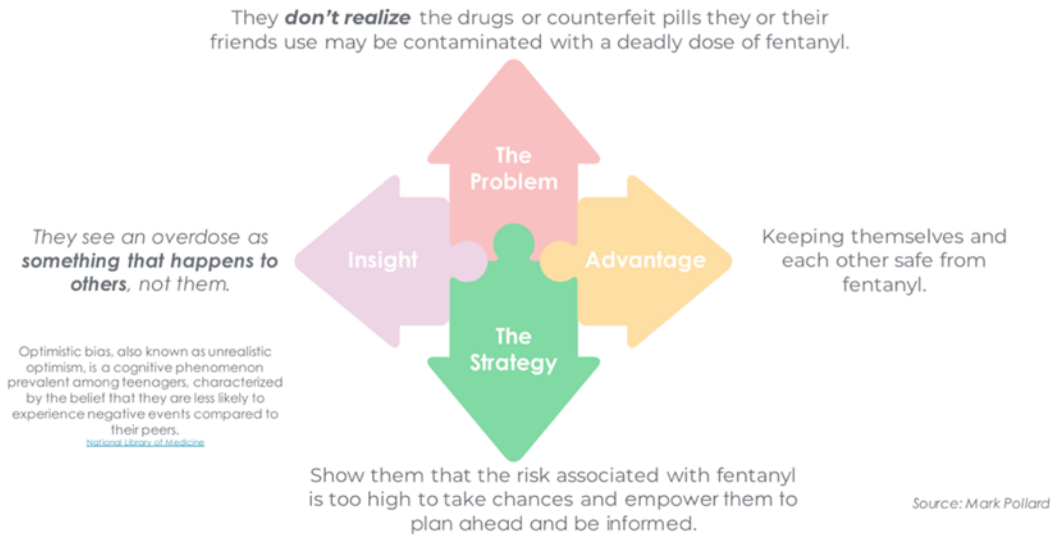


Figure 3: Strategic framework for the youth campaign, based on survey research the WA DOH conducted.

Campaign assets are featured in English and include:

- **Social media static graphics** and accompanying copy running via Meta platforms (Instagram and Facebook)
- **15-second animated video** ([here](#)) running via Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Digital Pre-Roll, and Digital OTT
- **30-second audio** spot running on traditional and digital radio
- **Billboards** up in counties across the state (24 billboards total, located in Asotin, Clallum, Cowlitz, Grays, Island, Kitsap, Mason, and Walla Walla counties)
- **Campaign website** ([here](#)) that features graphics and information geared toward our youth audience



Figure 4: Examples of the youth campaign static ads.

We promoted that no one knows if fentanyl will be present in the drugs or counterfeit pills and that there is significant risk in taking pills you aren't prescribed due to the unpredictability of the drug market. It is important to learn the signs of an overdose and carry naloxone to potentially help save someone in need.

Table 2: Campaign metrics (Youth) May 26-June 30 2025

Reach	Impressions	Link clicks	Video plays
786,204	6,435,472	13,607	629,003

Reach: How many unique users saw the content.

Impressions: Total number of views (including multiple views from the same people)

Engagement (reactions, shares, link clicks, video plays): the total number of times users interacted with the content.

** Washington's population for ages 14-28 in 2025 was estimated to be around 500,000, however we anticipated some of the increase in the numbers above is due to advertisement spillover into adjacent age ranges.*

These metrics are likely lower than the adult campaign metrics due to a lower number of youth and youth-specific channels in Washington.

The chosen concept, "Might be Fentanyl," evoked a short, catchy jingle to convey that even if they look real, no one knows what's in a pill unless it's prescribed to you and that naloxone can help reverse the effects of an overdose.

The campaign wrapped on June 30, 2025, and a full analysis report will be created on the metrics regarding this campaign to help assess overall success. The data above demonstrate

that the campaign was successful at engaging and reaching the audience. An ad recall and awareness survey will be held post-campaign run to help evaluate how well audiences remember and resonate with the advertisement after being exposed to it. This survey will give us further insight into the success of promoting behavior change and change in perception. These details can be provided once the full report is complete.

Recommendations

While substance use disorders and overdose are longstanding public health concerns that have continued to grow in recent years, we note that we have only been creating behavior change campaigns (also known as social marketing) surrounding this topic for two years total. It will take time to fully address the problem systemically, due to things such as stigma, budget cuts, new policies, and catching up to an ever-changing landscape. We recommend continued funding for campaign efforts on these topics to maintain or increase the progress we have started to see. We have been successful in effectively and efficiently addressing the populations at the highest disproportionate risk, and if we want to continue to help address the problem, we need to be ready to continue to evaluate who they might be as well as their specific needs.

Our current research shows that while there are many barriers to preventing opioid overdose, social marketing campaigns can help to address some facets of the problem. This includes

- Enhancing education on naloxone access, including how to use the medication
- Increasing education, awareness or use of hotlines and apps for substance use concerns
- Helping to empower people to learn how to recognize signs of an overdose while educating them on the necessary steps in case they should encounter this
- Providing compassionate and non-judgmental communications to help decrease stigma surrounding the topic of substance use, as this prevents many people from actively seeking help

Specific populations that are at a disproportionate risk of opioid overdose could additionally benefit from a tailored campaign that resonates specifically with their community. Based off late 2024 WA death certificate and opioid dashboard data, we could consider people who identify as veterans, American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Pacific Islander, unhoused communities, people who have been previously/recently incarcerated, or people who have or have had industrial occupations.

Conclusion

Addressing both public and self-stigma requires a long-term, multifaceted approach, and these campaigns have the foundation to be an impactful part of Washington's overall efforts to combat the overdose crisis. These campaigns bring forth compassionate and non-judgmental messaging and tonality that resonates with the audiences to help promote behavior change while also aiming to decrease stigma surrounding substance use. The preliminary data suggest that these campaigns were successful in reaching and engaging with the audience through their specific messaging and channels. With this success, we anticipate an increase in the number of people carrying naloxone, recognizing the signs of an overdose, and awareness of the risks associated with taking drugs that are not prescribed to them. And if people choose to continue to use, more people will know how to do so safely with someone they trust. All of these factors contribute to lower opioid overdose deaths in Washington.

While social marketing behavior change campaigns cannot overcome every obstacle in this landscape, they are incredible tools to help raise awareness, increase education, and empower people with ways to keep themselves or someone they love safe. Opioid overdose continues to contribute to a significant portion of deaths within Washington, and our work is far from over. Bringing long-term clear, compassionate communication and continuing to promote harm reduction behaviors statewide can continue to save lives in the face of opioid overdose.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Banner Ads: A banner ad is a rectangular ad that shows up on a website, usually at the top of the page. Its goal is to grab attention and encourage people to click on it, taking them to a webpage where they can learn more about a product or brand.

Billboards: Billboard ads are big ads that promote a brand or product. They're a popular type of outdoor advertising, also called out-of-home (OOH) advertising.

Broadcast TV: "Broadcast TV" means placing ads on traditional TV networks like ABC, CBS, or NBC. These ads run during commercial breaks in regular TV shows, reaching a big, general audience who are watching those channels.

Broadcast Radio: "Broadcast Radio" is when brands pay for ads to be played on regular radio stations. These ads air during the station's regular programming and reach a large number of listeners within a certain area.

Digital Audio: Digital audio advertising is when brands use ads in things like podcasts, music streaming, or online radio to reach people.

Digital TV/OTT: "Digital TV" or "OTT" (Over-the-Top) refers to ads shown on streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime Video. Instead of traditional cable or broadcast TV, these ads are delivered through internet-based video, allowing advertisers to target and personalize campaigns across devices like smart TVs, phones, and tablets.

Digital Video Pre-Roll: A "Digital Video Pre-Roll" is a short video ad that plays before the main video a user wants to watch on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, or websites. It's a way to show viewers a quick ad before they get to the content they're interested in, helping to grab attention and raise awareness.

Engagement: Can include reactions, shares, link clicks, video plays, etc. It is the total number of times users interacted with the content.

High Potency Synthetic Opioids (HPSOs): Synthetic opioids can have stronger effects than non-synthetic opioids. They are typically used to treat severe pain when used in a medical setting. Because they are more potent, they come with a higher risk of overdose and addiction. HPSOs can also be produced and sold illegally. Currently, most HPSOs are fentanyl or fentanyl analogs ("Fentanyl Analogs"). The primary HPSO on the illegal drug market currently is fentanyl. Illicit fentanyl can be pressed into pill form or distributed as a powder.

Impressions: An ad impression, or view-through, happens when a user sees an ad. This occurs every time someone opens an app or website and the ad appears on their screen. Each time an ad is shown and seen, it counts as an impression. Keep in mind, impressions are different from engagements, which involve interacting with the ad.

Naloxone: Also called Narcan, naloxone is a safe and effective medication that reverses opioid overdose. It does not work on overdoses caused by other substances. This medication is safe to give to people of all ages, including infants and toddlers, and can be easily administered by anyone.

Opioid: A substance that, when consumed, binds to a receptor in a person's brain and produces an effect. Effects can include inhibited respiratory drive, reduction of pain, feelings of euphoria, and constipation. Longer-term outcomes can include tolerance, possible dependency (and withdrawal when abstaining from use), and addiction.

Overdose: An opioid overdose occurs when a person has more opioids in their body than the body can handle. An overdose can cause breathing to slow or stop completely, which can lead to death.

Potency: A term used to describe how powerful a substance is. Illicit fentanyl has an unknown potency because it is unregulated, which increases the overdose and addiction risk to the user.

Print Ads: Print advertising uses things like newspapers, magazines, direct mail, and billboards to promote services and bring in more customers. The goal is to grab people's attention when they read certain publications or get something in the mail.

Reach: How many unique users saw the advertising content.

Social Marketing: Social Marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behavior change that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good – leading to sustainable, healthy, and equitable communities. Social marketing campaigns are broad initiatives designed to reach large populations and create widespread awareness or behavior change through marketing concepts. These typically use mass media, social media, print ads/posters or events to disseminate key messaging.

Static Ads: Static ads are ads that don't change or move. They look the same for everyone and can appear in things like magazines, websites, or social media.

Synthetic Opioids: Opioids that are manufactured from chemicals and artificial substances. This is different from other opioids, such as heroin, where some of the components were grown and harvested from the poppy plant. By comparison, synthetic opioids are relatively cheap to produce and can cause a large effect from a small dose.

