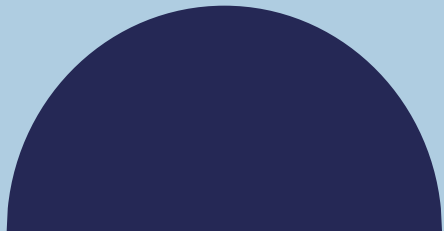


# Success in Small Places: Using Overdose Fatality Review Recommendations to Address Stigma in Rural Communities

Chance VanDover and Victoria Maurizio  
Salem County, New Jersey, Department Health and Human Services,  
Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services





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- **County:** Salem
- **City, state:** Salem, New Jersey
- **Year started:** 2020
- **Estimated number of overdose deaths per year:** 24
- **Size of jurisdiction:** ~65,000 residents
- **OFR Funding sources:** New Jersey Department of Health, Office of Opioid Response and Policy



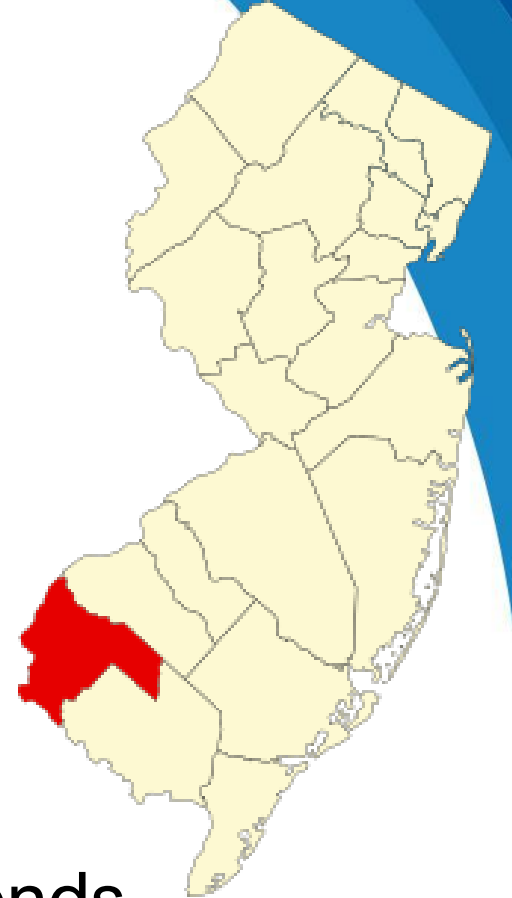
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## Salem County Overview

- New Jersey's smallest county: ~65,000 residents
- 45.3% live in low-population-density areas
- ~46% of land in Salem County is used for farming
- Proximity to large cities – a glimpse at impending trends





# Salem County OFR Overview

- Structure
  - OFR Team (monthly case review)
  - Workgroup (quarterly review trends and recommendations)
  - Executive committee (support recommendation implementation)
- Composition: medical providers, law enforcement agencies, public health entities, and more
  - Includes agencies outside of Salem County



## Example Member Agencies

- Addiction Medicine
- Department of Child Protection and Permanency
- Education/School Guidance Departments
- Emergency Rooms
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Halfway Housing
- Inpatient Care Facilities
- Mental Health Providers
- Municipal Law Enforcement
- New Jersey Department of Health
- Prevention Agencies
- Prevention Coalitions
- Salem County Corrections
- Salem County Prosecutor's Office
- Salem County Sheriff's Office
- Social Services
- State Parole Boards
- Tri-county Medical Examiner's Office



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## Recommendation Project: Stigma Reduction

**SALEM COUNTY**

**PROUD TO BE**

**STIGMA-FREE**

**#EndOverdose**

**#MentalHealthMatters**





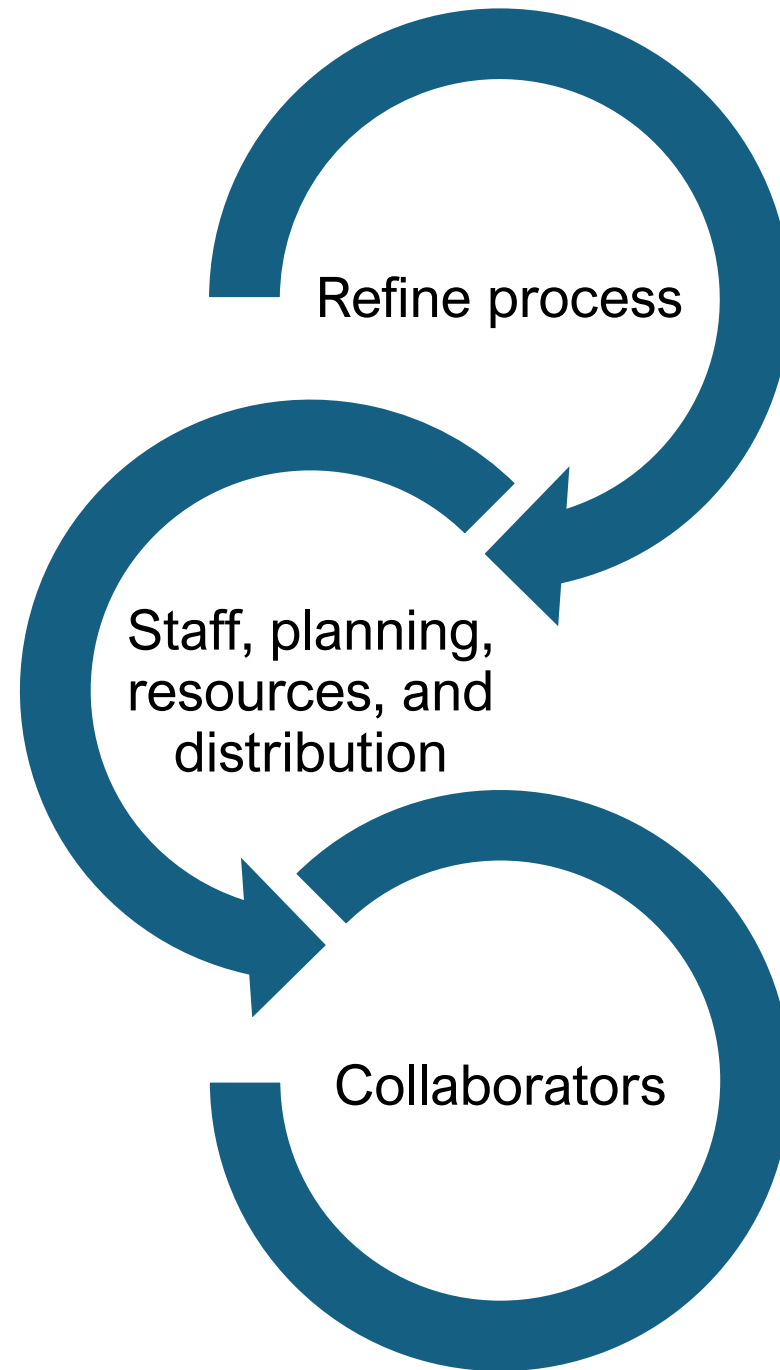
## Recommendation Origins

- Regularly identified
- Case details revealing barriers to care and recovery due to stigma and a need for substance use disorder-related community education
  - Internal stigma—self-conscious barriers
  - External stigma—family, social supports, and community pressures
- Notable cases—bystander unaware of how to respond



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# Recommendation Development





## Recommendation Development: Barriers

- Secluded populations
- Lack of transportation
- Deeply rooted stigma
- Limited access to overdose prevention supplies



## **A Project in Three Paths**

- Path A: Community Education
- Path B: Overdose Prevention
- Path C: Recovery Coaching



## Pathway A: Community Education

- People don't know what they don't know
  - Stigma quick card
- Annual awareness events
  - Opioid Summit
  - Stigma-Free Walk
  - Recovery Month
  - Overdose Awareness Day
- Outreach events to educate the community in the community



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# Stigma: Know the Facts



### Stigma is the mark of disgrace that results from the judgment of others.

- When an individual is labeled by their illness, they often experience feelings of shame, hopelessness, and reluctance to seek or accept help.
- More than half of people struggling don't receive help for their disorders due to feelings of shame and guilt associated with mental illness and substance use disorders.
- Individuals are usually reluctant to seek treatment or delay seeking treatment due to concerns about being treated differently or fears of being judged.
- Stigma against people with mental illness and substance use disorders can be subtle or obvious—but no matter the magnitude, it can lead to harm.



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## How Can I Reduce Stigma?

- See people, not conditions.
- Educate yourself and others on topics of mental health and substance use.
- Talk openly about mental health and substance use disorder.
- Choose supportive language.
- Speak out to correct stereotypes and myths.
- Offer support when possible.

### Take the Pledge to be Stigma-Free!



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PROUD TO BE  
STIGMA-FREE

#EndOverdose #MentalHealthMatters



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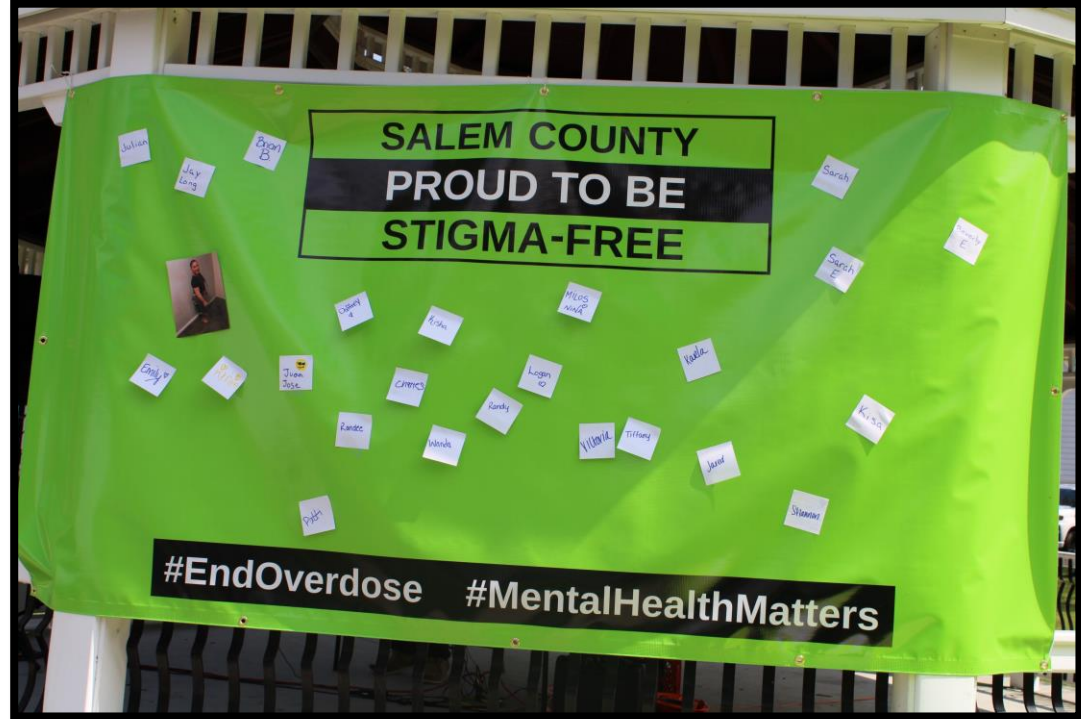
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## Pathway B: Overdose Prevention

- Naloxone, drug-testing strips, wound care, resources
- Opioid emergency boxes
- Stigma education



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## Pathway C: Recovery Coaching

- Connecting community members with recovery coaches
- Meeting people where they are
- Connecting to treatment during critical windows
- Maintaining relationships to encourage connections to resources
- Using trauma-informed and human-centered approaches



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**E**NCOURAGEMENT  
**S**UPPORT  
**C**OMMUNITY  
**U**NDERSTANDING  
**E**MPowerMENT

• YOU ARE NOT ALONE • TO SPEAK TO A RECOVERY COACH CALL •

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## Tracking Our Progress

- Outreach numbers – 79 outreach events in 2024
- Municipalities reached – 80% of Salem County municipalities
- Overdose prevention supplies distributed – 1,246 naloxone kits, 20 xylazine testing kits, more than 100 fentanyl testing kits, and the first wave of our wound care kits





## Tracking Our Progress in 2024, Continued

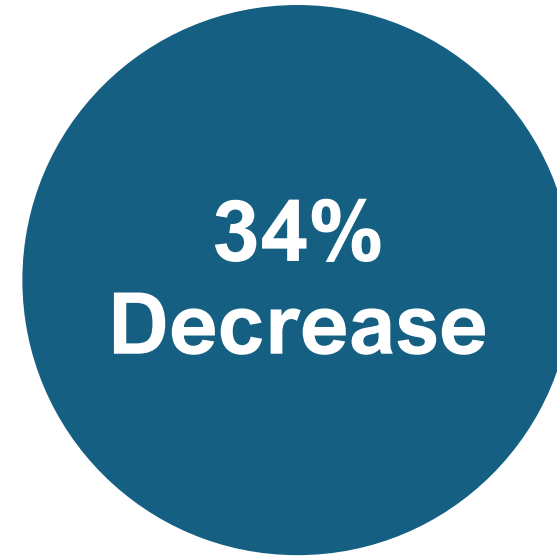
- Opioid emergency boxes installed (n=107)
- Number of requested trainings (n=19)
- Number of relationships formed with residents with SUD (n=95)
- Number of businesses that signed the stigma-free pledge (n=17)
- Attendee numbers at hosted events

Event	Number
Stigma-Free Walk	150
Opioid Summit	80
Overdose Awareness Day	100



## Outcomes

- Community reception
- Observed community interactions
- Shifts in perspective observed at repeat encounters



OFR  
2020–Present

Overdose Deaths



## For the Future

- Annual Stigma-Free Walk, Opioid Summit, Overdose Awareness Day, Recovery Month, and Knock Out Opioid Abuse Day
- Continued outreach schedule with furthered community connections
- Continued overdose prevention distribution, adapting to the evolving climate of substance use in Salem County



## Key Takeaways

- Regardless of the size of your jurisdiction, your collaborative work can lead to change
- Education is empowering, especially in communities that are less knowledgeable on opioid use disorder
- Embrace small starts, if necessary, for recommendation implementation



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