

# Lake County Opioid Settlement Strategy Report October 2024

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



THIRD HORIZON



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## BACKGROUND

In the Summer of 2024, Lake County, IL partnered with Third Horizon (TH) to help develop a plan to address the opioid crisis. The goals of the project included:

- Meeting with county staff and community members to gather perspectives and find areas where help is needed.
- Listening to community members to collect and analyze feedback about the current situation and the effectiveness of how the county spend its dollars to address opioid use disorder needs.
- Publishing a report that shares an analysis of the collected data with recommendations on using the opioid settlement funds in Lake County.

## APPROACH

TH reviewed community input, data, and National opioid settlement spending best practices. To gather community input, TH conducted focus groups, community town halls, and listening sessions in July and August 2024. The Lake County Health Department supplied data from various sources, including EMS, Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Vital Statistics, ESSENCE, and the county coroner. TH also analyzed demographic information from publicly available datasets such as the American Community Survey and the US Census Bureau.

To view the full report, visit: <https://www.lakecountyil.gov/DocumentCenter/View/77573/Lake-County-Opioid-Settlement-Strategy-Report>

## SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY IMPACT

TH identified common themes through its community engagement activities, which informed the firm’s broader strategy recommendations. These themes included:

### TOP FINDINGS



Participants stressed the importance of engaging community members with lived experiences and “boots on the ground” organizations as vital contributors to defining strategic priorities.



Upstream factors and social determinants of health, such as access to affordable housing and consistent transportation, can pose significant barriers to recovery and require dedicated resources.



Community stigma and a general lack of cultural and linguistic competency hinder access to treatment and recovery services.



Increasing prevention, early intervention, and education are vital as young people are a population of focus.



Care for mental health and substance use disorders happening at the same time and comprehensive wraparound services can create a better environment for recovery.



Hiring and keeping a quality workforce for the opioid use disorder system is difficult but must remain a primary focus.



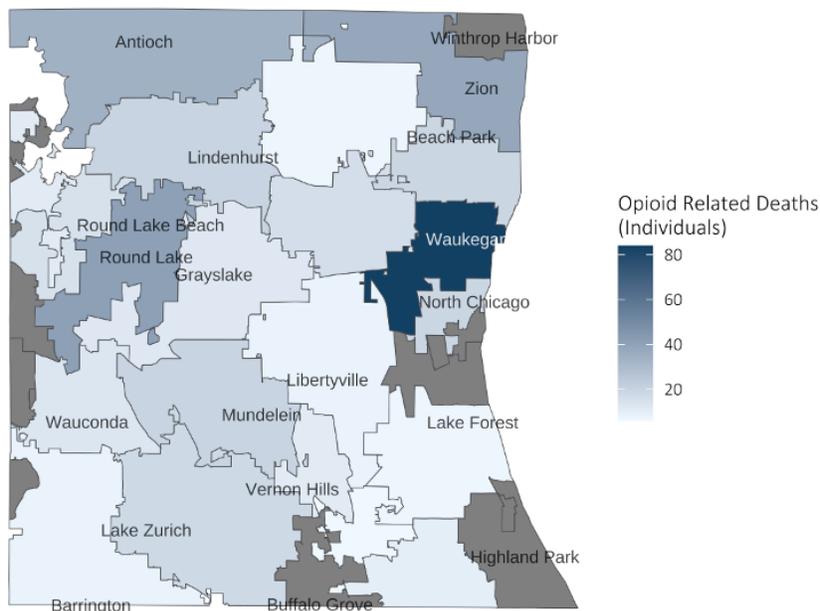
Planning for and utilizing opioid settlement funds must be transparent and include the entire County.

## DATA FINDINGS

TH analysis found differences in health based on where people live, their earnings, and their race/ethnicity. The poverty rate in northeastern parts of the county, like North Chicago, Waukegan, and Zion, is the highest in Lake County. These areas have more Black and Hispanic/Latinx residents compared to other parts of the county. The data shows inequities in these locations related to social needs such as food insecurity, crowded housing, and lack of vehicle access.

Over the past five years, opioid-related deaths in Lake County have continued to rise, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Although Black people make up only 7 percent of the county's population, they represent 20 percent of all opioid-related deaths from 2018 - 2022. During that time period, Waukegan reported the highest number of overdose deaths. In 2023, The recommendations for spending the settlement funds consider this unequal impact and the health challenges faced by different communities in the county.

### Distribution of All Opioid-Related Deaths Across Lake County, 2018-2022



Source: IDPH Vital Statistics provided to Lake County  
ZIP codes in gray indicate data suppression

# RECOMMENDATIONS

TH developed recommendations to help guide how Lake County spends money from the opioid settlements. The suggestions are based on national guidelines, best practices, community feedback, data, and input from county leaders. The recommendations are split into two parts.

## KEY FUNDING STRATEGIES

### PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

#### RECOMMENDATION 1:

**Adopt the National Principles of Opioid Settlement Fund Spending, adapted to meet community needs.**

#### RECOMMENDATION 2:

**Develop an evaluation and measurement strategy for ongoing performance monitoring of program goals.**

#### RECOMMENDATION 3:

**Publish a website for opioid funding initiatives.**

#### RECOMMENDATION 4:

**Continue engagement with other county departments and agencies to ensure coordination of program funding.**

#### RECOMMENDATION 5:

**Seek continuous community engagement throughout funding strategy planning and distribution.**

### FUNDING STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### RECOMMENDATION 6:

**Prioritize initial funding opportunities to address immediate community gaps:**

- **• OUD recovery and support services, such as withdrawal management**
- **• Case management and individualized assistance in navigating treatment and recovery services**
- **• Address social drivers of health, e.g. limited public transportation, lack of stable housing and limited access to care for individuals uninsured or on Medicaid**
- **• Services to reduce drug-related risks and harms**
- **• Upstream prevention interventions with youth**

#### RECOMMENDATION 7:

**Identify existing community assets and gaps to guide future funding priorities.**



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