



What Can We Do about Drug Abuse in Fayette County?



A Guide for Community Discussions

Fayette County Substance Abuse Task Force
West Virginia Center for Civic Life



Welcome to the Forum!



The Fayette County Substance Abuse Task Force and the West Virginia Center for Civic Life have joined with organizations and individuals in Fayette County to sponsor community discussions to address substance abuse in the region. This discussion guide grew out of widespread concern about drug abuse and close to 300 interviews with Fayette County residents about what should be done about it.

The purpose of the forum is to work together to –

- Better understand the issue;
- Consider the benefits and drawbacks of different approaches to the issue;
- Identify actions that will be supported throughout our communities with time, energy, and resources;
- Examine the roles of government, schools, businesses, civic and religious groups, and individuals; and
- Identify next steps for discussion and action.

The forums are intended as a starting point that will lead to discussions and actions by wider circles of people in Fayette County. The ideas from the forums will be discussed by the general public, local organizations, and local and state officeholders in regional and county-wide Action Summits, designed to move from *talking together* to *working together* to reduce drug abuse in Fayette County.

The Fayette County Substance Abuse Task Force is a coalition of organizations and agencies working together to reduce substance abuse and its harmful effect on children and families, including Fayette County Department of Health and Human Resources, WV Prevention Resource Center, Fayette County Prevention Partnership, Fayette County Community Corrections Program, United Way of Southern WV, Fayette County Board of Education, Fayette County Family Resource Network and local citizens and families. For more information, contact Aletha L. Stolar, Fayetteville, West Virginia. Phone: 304-574-4338, Email: fayettefrn@gmail.com.

The West Virginia Center for Civic Life is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to involve West Virginians in public discussions about issues that affect the quality of life in the state. The Center works with communities to frame issues for public discussion and to convene and moderate deliberative forums. For more information, contact Betty Knighton, West Virginia Center for Civic Life. Phone: 304-344-3430, Email: knighton@wvciviclifec.org, Website: www.wvciviclifec.org

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INTRODUCTION

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During the past decade, the growing abuse of illegal and prescription drugs in Fayette County has increased among adults and youth, harming individuals, families and communities. Drug abuse threatens the health, safety, family structures and economy of Fayette County.



How can we promote healthy living?

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Many people in Fayette County feel that the key to discouraging drug use is working together in our neighborhoods to build healthy families. They believe that when communities work together to provide good information and healthy activities, drug abuse will decrease.



How can we provide treatment and support recovery?

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Many people in Fayette County believe that access to good treatment programs and ongoing support for recovery are the most effective ways to deal with drug abuse. They believe that through positive treatment and recovery, drug abusers can succeed in building healthy, productive lives.



How can we support enforcement of laws and regulations?

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Many people in Fayette County feel that the key to reducing drug abuse is to support strong regulations and laws that discourage drug use, protect residents, and drive out drug dealers. They believe that law enforcement is the most effective way to keep drugs out of our neighborhoods and communities.

Making It Happen

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What can we do to reduce drug abuse in Fayette County?



Almost 48,000 West Virginians call Fayette County home. It is also home to the world-renowned New River Gorge and host to the internationally-known “Bridge Day.” Some of West Virginia’s most beautiful parks and wildlife areas are located here.

Against this backdrop is a serious and complex problem. During the past decade, the abuse of both illegal and prescription drugs in Fayette County has increased among adults and youth, harming individuals, families, and communities. Drug abuse is having a destructive effect on our health, our safety, and our economy.



A coalition of Fayette County residents prepared this guide to help citizens discuss and act on this crucial problem. Substance abuse is a complex issue. To make progress, it will take action from people in every corner of our communities—law enforcement, education, health care, business, government, faith groups, social services, and individuals and neighborhoods throughout the county.

Drug Abuse – A Serious Issue in Fayette County and West Virginia

The West Virginia Prevention Resource Center has been compiling data about drug abuse in Fayette County from a variety of reliable sources, and it paints a sobering picture. Nearly all of the data indicates percentages higher in Fayette County than average in West Virginia.

	Fayette County	West Virginia
Adults 18 – 25 who used marijuana in past month	12.71%	11.77%
Youth (8th and 11th grades using marijuana in past month	24%	17.2%
Drug related mortality rate.	13.6 per 100,000	12.82 per 100,000
Youth (8th and 11th grade) receiving services for substance abuse.	9.6%	8.4%

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, from 2002 to 2005, West Virginia moved from *below* to *above* the national average for illegal drug use (non-marijuana), and remained well above the national average in the abuse of pain relievers.

In 2003 the National Drug Intelligence Center of the U.S. Department of Justice did a drug threat assessment for West Virginia. They found that “the production, distribution and abuse of illicit drugs and the diversion and abuse of pharmaceuticals pose serious threats to West Virginia.”

- In five years (1999-2004), deaths resulting from unintentional poisoning in West Virginia rose 550%, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP). A large proportion of these deaths are related to prescription drug overdoses.
- In 2006, unintentional drug poisonings were the *leading cause of death* in West Virginia for adults under the age of 45. These rates were the *highest in the country* as reported by the CDCP.
- In 2007, there were 21 deaths in Fayette County from unintended prescription drug overdoses, according to the West Virginia Health Statistics Center.

Why Drug Abuse Is Everyone’s Problem

Effect on Families

- In Fayette and Raleigh Counties, the Department of Health and Human Services reports that substance abuse by a parent was a factor *30% of the time* when a child was removed from a home in 2005-2006.
- According to the Women’s Resource Center serving Fayette County, 85% of reported domestic violence incidents involve substance abuse of some type. Abusers and victims are often under the influence of drugs when they harm family members or each other.

Effect on Youth

- Pride Surveys (a widely used measurement of adolescent drug use in America) show that 22% of Fayette County high school seniors report that they use marijuana at least once a month.
- Between 1992 and 2003 prescription drug abuse by 12-17 year olds in the United States rose 212%, according to a 2008 report by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

In one year, West Virginia filled an average of 17.2 prescriptions per person, the highest in the country. The national average is 11.5.

Kaiser Family Foundation, data calculated by Verispan. L.L.C. 2006

“If the problem in our community becomes larger than it already is, the people I care about will become involved – voluntarily or unintentionally.”

High School Student, Oak Hill

Effect on Business and the Economy

- Some employers in Fayette County have reported difficulty finding employees who can successfully pass a drug screening before they are hired. They also say that when they do find “clean” employees, their work sometimes suffers as they deal with family members who are abusing drugs.
- Companies want to locate in areas where their workers can feel safe and enjoy a sense of well-being. They want to hire a healthy and sober workforce. Many in Fayette County are concerned that drug abuse could stand in the way of attracting more jobs in the area.

What Can We Do?

In this forum, we will discuss several key questions about dealing with drug abuse in Fayette County.

- **How can we promote healthy living?**
- **How can we provide treatment and support recovery?**
- **How can we support enforcement of laws and regulations?**

Many of us will see at least some value in these approaches. The challenge lies in coming to agreement on priorities and being willing to act on them. To do so, we need to grapple with these questions:

- If we can't do everything at once, where should we start?
- What actions are likely to have the greatest impact?
- What actions will we support with our time, energy, and resources?
- What should we expect from government, from our schools and communities, from business leaders and from ourselves?

This forum is the beginning of this important conversation. We hope it leads to further discussions, involving wider circles of people who care about the issue and are willing to work together.



Excerpt from Nicole's Story

A Fayette County mother talks about her daughter's struggle with prescription drug abuse

“As a mother, I hope for the very honor it would be to sit at the breakfast table with a warm cup of coffee and share together in pleasant conversation our desires, our disappointments and the things we yet hope for. My daughter and I. I miss her.

She had become my friend and there will never be another to take her place. Time is escaping, I am growing older, our days will be less and less. I am heartbroken, I am angry, and I am confused. How do we make another see the pain and torment of drug addiction and abuse? She is numb, unattached and unreachable most days, but she remains still... my daughter. Can anyone hear my cry? My daughter is highly valued and she is worth saving. My daughter can still change no matter the opinions of the critics on the sidelines. My daughter is still breathing and where there is breath...there remains hope.

I have been awakened to the seriousness of drug abuse due to my personal experience. I am concerned for a society where it is becoming increasingly accepted. I stand amazed at the availability of prescription drugs and narcotics that are highly addictive. How can this continue without the long-term effect becoming the total destruction of the family structure? I am convinced that we cannot continue on this path.”

How can we promote healthy living?

When neighbors work together to make sure that all families have access to healthy places, programs and information, they create an environment that discourages drug use and favors healthy choices. From this perspective, there is an important role for every individual in the community to play. Supporting youth, helping families and working to improve neighborhood conditions are strategies for preventing drug abuse. These actions also help to prevent drug abuse from happening in the first place, which is the simplest and most cost-effective solution to the problem.



What Can We Do?

- **Develop a community awareness campaign.** Drug abuse is a problem that cannot be blamed solely on will power. A better public understanding of the causes of addiction can encourage neighbors to help families dealing with this difficult issue. Community organizations and volunteers can work together to develop key messages and share them with the public.
- **Create healthy neighborhoods.** Healthy neighborhoods can discourage drug use and encourage treatment. Neighbors can work together to develop walking groups, build a community garden that grows healthy food for all, and plan community health fairs that provide screenings and healthy information.
- **Support increased resources for community programs that help families.** Churches, businesses and civic clubs can work together to raise money for programs that help families with their basic needs. Individuals can contribute food, clothing, toys and other goods to programs that share these resources with families.
- **Involve youth in prevention.** Young people can provide leadership in drug prevention activities. Family and community members can work together to develop youth mentoring programs, plan youth field trips outside of the county, or begin a Youth Advisory Council to the County Commission.
- **Take individual responsibility for the problem.** Everyone can commit to learning more about the drug abuse problem in Fayette County. We can be good neighbors, and we can talk to children and teenagers about the dangers of drug abuse. We can teach ourselves and our families safe practices for using and storing prescription drugs.



What challenges do we face?

- Many people feel that the drug problems of their neighbors are “none of their business” and will not feel comfortable getting involved.
- Community-centered approaches demand a substantial commitment of time and resources.
- A community-focused strategy doesn’t address the physiological and/or genetic components of drug addiction. Many people struggle with drug abuse regardless of the strengths of their families and community.

“Reach out to people and try to help them in a way that prevents the problem.”

Fayetteville Resident

Would you support this approach even if . . .

- You would have to volunteer more time in your neighborhood?
- You would have to spend more time thinking and learning about drug abuse?

Notes: _____

How can we provide treatment and support recovery?

In addition to stopping drug abuse, the goal of treatment and recovery is to help people return to a productive place in their family, workplace and community. Research shows that many people who have access to good treatment and recovery programs can stop using drugs, decrease criminal activity and improve the quality of their lives overall. The accessibility, affordability and quality of both treatment and recovery programs are key to providing help to addicts who need it. Far too many addicted drug users in Fayette County cannot benefit from the help that good rehabilitation programs provide. There are relatively few local

treatment or recovery resources, so often travel to facilities outside of the county is required. People often struggle to afford services, or they do not meet certain medical eligibility requirements. Some do not have transportation to get to the services that are available



What Can We Do?

- **Support the establishment of high quality treatment and recovery facilities in Fayette County.** When people can receive treatment and recovery close to family and community support, they are more likely to succeed. Community organizations and county officials can work together to explore successful treatment programs and secure the funding to build a treatment facility in Fayette County. Local officials and neighborhood organizations can work together to modify community housing into effective recovery homes. Community support is necessary to build treatment and recovery programs in Fayette County neighborhoods.
- **Develop circles of support in the community.** People who are addicted to drugs often have a difficult time navigating the treatment and recovery system. Community mentors and advocates can help these individuals make the necessary phone calls, track down important information and cut through the red tape. They can provide moral support throughout and following the treatment and recovery process, which can include helping the individual make important lifestyle changes.
- **Make it a legislative priority to understand and address treatment barriers.** Many people who need treatment “slip through the cracks” because of the restrictive policies of state and federal programs and private insurers. Fayette County legislators, with the support



of their constituents, can examine the most common reasons why treatment is not readily accessible, and advocate for changes that eliminate these barriers.

- **Establish treatment and recovery services in local high schools.** For a young person dealing with addiction, treatment in a far-away facility can often mean family separation and an interruption in their education. Expanded treatment and recovery services in school-based health centers can provide youth with ongoing recovery services on a daily basis, improving their chances for a successful life. School officials, parents, medical professionals and school-based health personnel can meet to discuss the possibility of such a program, and work together to find the funding for a pilot project in Fayette County.

“Jail is not always the answer. These people are sick and need the proper help.”

Fayetteville Resident

What challenges do we face?

- Many people fear that the presence of a treatment facility or recovery homes in their neighborhood will attract crime and endanger their children. Getting community support for treatment facilities is often difficult.
- Long-term plans to build treatment centers and change laws won’t help people who need treatment now.

Would you support this approach even if . . .

- A treatment center or recovery program were established in your neighborhood?
- Your children would be attending school with youth in drug abuse treatment and recovery?

Notes: _____



How can we support enforcement of laws and regulations?

Many people in Fayette County feel strongly that strong, effective law enforcement is key to protecting residents, discouraging drug use and driving out drug pushers. Even though there are laws with serious criminal penalties for buying or selling illegal substances and the illegal use of prescription drugs, the enforcement of these laws is difficult without effective community partnerships and support. The enormous scope and escalating rate of the drug abuse problem, budget cutbacks, the need for additional training and equipment, unclear regulations for dealing with prescription drug trafficking, and crowded court systems all present a challenging situation that requires citizen support.

Enforcement of laws and regulations can only be effective with citizen cooperation. This means that the community must be committed to doing what is necessary to support, respect and reinforce rules that have been designed to create drug-free homes, schools and workplaces.



What Can We Do?

- **Secure financial resources to improve law enforcement capacity.** Having additional police officers in the county, who are trained in drug enforcement, will send a clear message that illegal drug activity is not tolerated. In addition to punishing offenders, strong enforcement may discourage future drug related activity. Community organizations can work together to apply for state and federal funds for increasing law enforcement personnel. Community fundraisers can help to purchase additional equipment and training for officers.
- **Regulate users and prescribers of pharmaceuticals.** Law enforcement officials need more tools for dealing with the problem of prescription drug abuse. West Virginia could discourage “doctor shopping” by requiring strict monitoring of prescriptions drugs through state databases.
- **Increase law enforcement presence in local schools and in areas frequently visited by youth.** While Fayette County schools and law enforcement have a working partnership, more officers dedicated to watching and protecting youth from drug abuse can have an increased positive impact. Parents, school officials and law enforcement can work together to determine the best places to station additional officers and raise the funds to support the cost.



- **Institute mandatory drug-testing policies.** Fayette County Schools could institute a random drug-testing policy for students and employees. Local employers could require drug screening of employees.
- **Organize a neighborhood watch.** When an entire neighborhood participates in an organized neighborhood watch program, the impact on neighborhood safety is quite noticeable. Law enforcement officials can work with interested neighborhoods to provide the necessary guidance and training to plan and implement an effective program.

“We have to shut down the dealers. Even small time dealers should be arrested.”

Oak Hill Resident

What challenges do we face?

- Law enforcement can be an expensive way of dealing with drug abuse.
- Increased enforcement does not deal with the problems that lead to drug abuse.

Would you support this approach even if . . .

- More of your tax dollars went toward the cost of jailing drug abusers?
- You would have to submit to drug testing?

Notes: _____

In this forum, we have explored different approaches for dealing with drug abuse in Fayette County. Though the approaches overlap in some respects, they suggest different priorities for action that would bring different benefits and trade-offs. Now it's time to reflect on your experience in the forum.

Individually...

What new information or insights did you gain?

How did your own thinking about the issue change?

How did your thinking about other people's views change?

As a group...

What actions are we most willing to support, and why?

What actions are we least willing to support, and why?

What trade-offs are we most willing to accept?

What tough choices do we still need to grapple with?

Moving to Action

Most people who participate in forums want to do more than talk about the problem; they also want to consider actions that will improve the situation. What are the opportunities for action that emerged from this forum?

What are the possibilities?

What can we each do personally to address Fayette County's drug abuse problem?

What can our schools and communities do about the issue?

What policies – local, state or national – could be changed to prevent drug abuse and improve treatment options?

How else can we use what we learned today?

Where should we start?

What actions are most likely to have the greatest impact?

What actions are most likely to be supported with time, energy, and resources?

Who needs to be involved?

What will be our next steps?



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