

Advocating for **USING OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS FOR PREVENTION**



OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS

States and local communities are receiving more than \$50 billion to address harms from the opioid crisis through settlements of their lawsuits against opioid manufacturers, distributors, pharmacies, and other companies involved in making and selling opioids. To prevent these opioid settlement funds (OSF) from being used for purposes unrelated to addressing the opioid crisis, the settlement agreements outline ways the funds should be used to bolster prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery efforts.

INVESTING IN PREVENTION

What is prevention?

Research shows primary prevention is the most effective approach for reducing youth substance use. This involves: (1) **reducing risk factors** that contribute to an individual's risk for using substances and (2) **increasing protective factors** that help young people live healthy lives. Key strategies include building resilience and coping skills; empowering youth; promoting mental wellbeing; strengthening relationships between youth and their families, schools, and communities; and creating healthy, substance-free environments for young people.

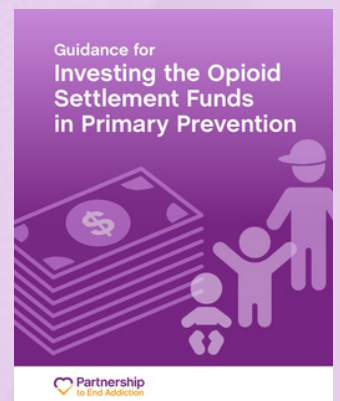
Using the OSF for prevention

Exhibit E of the national Settlement Agreement outlines many ways the funds can be used for primary prevention, including: evidence-based prevention programs in schools, school-based mental health services, community coalitions, community-based programs that engage youth and families, and programs and supports for pregnant women and parents with substance use disorder.

Why advocate for prevention funding?

The OSF present an unprecedented opportunity both to address the current opioid epidemic *and prevent future addiction crises*. Investing in harm reduction, treatment, and recovery efforts is key, particularly while overdose deaths remain high, but prevention is another critical component to addressing the crisis, and it often is overlooked and underfunded. Until prevention is prioritized, cycles of addiction will continue.

Learn more in our guide:



HOW TO ADVOCATE

Find the decision-makers



The people/agencies responsible for determining how to spend OSF vary by state and community. Some examples of who may have that authority include the attorney general, legislature, governor, mayor, city or county officials, or an advisory committee. To find the relevant decision-makers where you live, as well as how your community may already be using the OSF, check out these resources:

- National Academy for State Health Policy's [opioid settlement state tracker](#) (see, in particular "Administrative Approaches")
- Vital Strategies' [Guides for Community Advocates on the Opioid Settlements](#)
- Johns Hopkins' [Opioid Settlement Expenditures](#) dashboard

Get in touch



The process for allocating funds also varies by location. Some states and communities have listening sessions or online written comment opportunities to get public input on how to spend the funds. Others may not have these formal opportunities, but once you have found the relevant decision-maker, you can always send an email or letter or make a phone call. To find the opportunities for engagement/public input where you live, check out these resources:

- Vital Strategies' [Guides for Community Advocates on the Opioid Settlements](#)
- OpioidSettlementTracker.com's [live input opportunities](#)

Talk about prevention



Often, the people making the decisions about how to spend the OSF are not substance use experts. They may not understand the importance of prevention or know what effective prevention looks like. You can encourage the decision-makers where you live to spend the OSF on effective substance use prevention by:

- **Explaining the importance of prevention:** Preventing and delaying substance use is critical, as early use is a key risk factor for addiction due to young people's ongoing brain development. A primary prevention approach targets the varied and complex traits and experiences that lead to youth substance use. This approach also targets other negative outcomes that share these same risk and protective factors (e.g., mental illness, violence, school dropout).
- **Highlighting the limited resources going to prevention:** Prevention is often under-resourced and lacks many other funding sources.
- **Providing examples of effective substance use prevention:** Effective prevention strategies are underutilized and misunderstood, and ineffective (e.g., scare tactics) and insufficient strategies continue to be widely used. Primary prevention aims to build youth resilience, empowerment, and strong relationships – that helps prevent substance use, even if there is not a seemingly obvious link. There are many prevention programs backed by research, including school- and community-based services and programs.
- **Sharing our guide:** [Guidance for Investing the Opioid Settlement Funds in Primary Prevention](#) outlines for decision-makers (and advocates!) the research on effective prevention, how the OSF can be used for primary prevention, and real-world examples of communities using OSF for primary prevention-aligned strategies (which can serve as a model for your community!).