

Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Misuse Prevention

Affected Families & Friends Work Group

August 20, 2026 from 12 to 1:30 p.m. via Zoom

(The following minutes and discussion are for informational purposes only and do not represent the position of the University of Colorado.)

Present:

Sarah Werner and Tracy Ritter, Co-chairs
Teresa Cobleigh, Opioid Response Network
Marcie Buel, Advocates for Recovery Colorado; Julie Wright, Maddie Wright Foundation;
Kyle Cordova, Purple Mountain Recovery; Thomas Cross and Nathan Heimer,
Broomfield United Methodist Church; Lucrecia Medrano, Yarrow Collective; Domingo
Cruz, Rooted 303; Lorraine Hoover, Raymond Rountree, Jr. Foundation
Consortium: Jen Place, Shayna Micucci, Jessica Eaddy, Kristin Carpenter, Rosemarie
MacDowell

Absent: See attached roster.

Sarah Werner called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. and provided an overview of the work group mission. Shayna Micucci reviewed the Consortium's structure and the work group's projects.

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the May 2026 meeting minutes. Motion approved.

Presentation: Cultural and Faith-Based Approaches to Supporting Families Affected by Substance Use Disorder. Guests from the above-mentioned faith-based and cultural programs discussed their approaches and responded to the following questions:

- *How do cultural or faith-based traditions understand/consider substance use disorder?*
- *What forms of stigma do families experience within different communities?*
- *What are the barriers to collaboration between communities, between communities and treatment, and recovery providers and supporters?*
- *How can traditions and spiritual beliefs of families be honored while assuring they have access to treatment, support, and care?*

Lorraine Hoover, Raymond Rountree, Jr. Foundation: Lorraine is an ordained minister and woman of color. The faith-based foundation was established in memory of her brother, who lost his life to an overdose. Lorraine spoke about racial discrimination and the challenges experienced by people of color, including how those experiences affected her brother. She explained that, within the Black community, substance use and mental health challenges can be viewed as signs of weakness and discourage individuals from seeking help. Culturally relevant resources are also lacking. She noted that many services available tend to be oriented towards white communities, making it more difficult for some members of the Black community to relate to, or feel comfortable accessing, those services.

Kyle Cordova, Purple Mountain Recovery: Kyle's organization is LGBTQ+-centered and committed to providing inclusive services that reflect the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ communities. He spoke about the stigma experienced by the community, particularly relative to religious organizations. The recovery program at Purple Mountain accepts all forms of recovery, including recovery that is faith-based. Kyle addressed the reticence within the Latino community to discuss substance use.

Lucrecia Medrano, Yarrow Collective: The collective serves the unhoused as well as those who are incarcerated. They have had an influx of Spanish-speaking people, and the language barrier presents a major issue when navigating resources. Lucrecia provided an example of work they have done in the Larimer County Jail. They meet with the incarcerated participants to assess their needs and then develop a curriculum based on those needs.

Domingo Cruz, Rooted 303: Domingo's organization provides a variety of services that take into consideration the differences in cultural backgrounds. He gave an example of a Native American client experiencing grief after losing a loved one to substance use and how they utilized the client's Native American rituals (mourning songs). He spoke about his own Puerto Rican background and how life experiences and cultures inform beliefs and responses to recovery modalities.

Thomas Cross, United Methodist Church: The church does not have formal programs at present other than an AA group that meets at the church. He said that he and Nathan Heimer were attending the meeting to learn about programs that could be helpful for their community.

Nathan Heimer, United Methodist Church: Nathan works with people who are unhoused. Lack of housing has contributed to substance use. He spoke about the importance of a compassionate response, seeing all people for their true humanity and the necessity of resources to help support individuals in need.

Marcie Buel, Advocates for Recovery Colorado: Marcie is a family support specialist. She works with families supporting loved ones who are in recovery or active substance use. Their services are free. No insurance is required.

Julie Wright, Maddie Wright Foundation: The foundation is a Denver Metro-based nonprofit that organizes educational and public awareness events in schools and at public concerts. The foundation team has a varied background, including Spanish-speaking members and members of the LGBTQ community. Children in local schools speak many other languages and Julie suggested that having more resources available in multiple languages would help remove this barrier.

Discussion/comments:

Tracey asked meeting participants to share other forms of stigma they have experienced within different families and communities.

Marcie Buel: Shame is one of the biggest ones. Feeling isolated and alone and knowing that you have something going on within your family.

Teresa Cobleigh: I'm not going to answer that question, but I am going to say that as a parent who has raised teenagers in a vulnerable time, there should be better youth support programs within faith organizations and more awareness about the dangers of street drugs. We are

missing a huge opportunity when we do not engage our churches and faith centers in the conversation. I would start with fighting stigma within the church population and look at the topic of the good Samaritan – what is it biblically, how does it translate into laws, and how we treat each other. How should we respond to what we see on the street? Teen programs for prevention – young people today are not getting enough support. We can do better when it comes to engaging our children.

Kyle Cordova: One of the harder things within the LGBTQ is finding a safe place within some of religious organizations because of stigma and shame.

Sarah Werner: We tend to be isolated in our “little bubbles and silos” and not understand the stigma that is still out there in communities. We need to deal with people in a non-judgmental way that is helpful instead of harmful. I like to think that is practiced a lot, but I’m hearing that it’s not.

Nathan Heimer: I think I have a different lived experience. The church was the thing that really supported me and has supported my kids around addiction. My kids find it more acceptable in the secular world and have found a lot more support through avoiding it through the church. It was really helpful knowing that I had the safety net of the church, and I was lucky. It was the only place I could have those honest conversations. I was a youth pastor for about 20 years. There are so many different programs and organizations that I’ve worked with in partnership with schools and faith communities addressing these things. I feel like it’s ramped up over the years. My kids have felt the same thing. They said that they’ve had more support to explore these things honestly instead of just seeing them from the outside or a friend telling them about it. It’s interesting that we’re seeing different perspectives, and I would love to drill down a little bit more on why that could be.

Lorraine Hoover: I don’t want to label that every church or every faith-based organization is an issue, but I think there are certain churches that are more religious in the context that they believe in certain things, but they don’t deal with the substance of a human being – it’s just a process that is opposed to the spiritual guidance of seeing people as human. It shows why it’s important for us as a community to come together because there are differences, and again, it’s because of being human. I can look at each individual and say that that’s where they are -- It’s not that they have to be a certain way. I’ve learned through this process and am still learning. It’s important for us to have these dialogues for healing. I promote that we’re a faith-based organization, but we don’t push that on people. We believe in starting our interviews with prayer, but we ask them if they’re open to prayer and if they’re not, we don’t push it on them. If we approve an application, we basically allow people to apply for services and support for their sober living.

Domingo Cruz: I do the exact opposite. I’m a pastor and our organization is founded on scripture. When I meet with people, the first thing I tell them is we are not a Christian organization. Our approach is a cognitive behavioral one, and we use a lot more of those tools. We follow people’s spirituality as it goes. A lot of times working with people their spiritual belief system is super important to them, so you land back there at some point if it’s important to that individual. I feel a lot of the stigma, whether from churches or communities, is because people have a vision and image in their mind of what addiction looks like. A mom whose son overdosed on fentanyl and survived wanted to do classes to teach other moms in her community how to use Narcan, but asked me not to send someone who looked like a “druggie” off the street -- a stereotype.

Marcie Buel: I've heard some of those same similarities as well and experienced that in different settings where you'll share something with someone within your family circle and think that it's safe, but then you show up at a family event and the entire family knows, and now you feel like an outcast.

Shayna Micucci: I support some of the Black community efforts through the Consortium and some of the things that we've heard from the community is that reaching out when there's an issue gives a perception of weakness, which is not culturally acceptable. I think that some of those dynamics probably show up for a lot of groups.

Nathan Heimer: Isn't that the bigger picture of America for us -- you pull yourself up by your bootstraps and if you have anything wrong with you, it's a failure of yourself? People often tend not to see the humanity of people first. I've worked at shelters and at the church now and listened to the circumstances that led to their current issues. They are just as desperate to shift that perception of themselves as others are for them. I don't think it's right for people to perceive them in that fashion, but I think it's unfortunately how we in America created it to be. I can't even imagine some of the circumstances that have led to that and try to imagine why they would turn to something to help numb the pain that they're experiencing. For me, as a minister, how do I walk alongside them? How do I show them love and care? Again, some have deep faiths, and some don't have faith at all.

Sarah Werner: I think within a family, that happens a lot. If there's a family member struggling, it's shameful, and it's embarrassing for the other family members. I saw this with my brother, who was an alcoholic for years, and my father found it so shameful and embarrassing that he didn't like to include my brother in any family gatherings. He really made a bad situation worse. Someone else said it's considered a moral failing, and that's exactly what it was treated like. Even within our family unit, our little community, we didn't talk about it, and we didn't deal with it.

- *Tracey asked participants to comment on how family traditions and spiritual beliefs can be honored while assuring access to treatment, support, and care.*

Lorraine Hoover: I think we need to learn how to coexist so we can broaden the substance of what faith is and remove the shame. I think shame is the root of all evil as well as judgment of weakness. We can then take off the blinders of stigma that we've been taught for generations and that have separated us. We can then talk about the strengths within each culture to bring us together and to respect each other and understand the wounds. I guess the takeaway from this is how can we connect to continue the dialogue and share tools?

Lucrecia Medrano: Something that we talk about frequently in our training is self reflection. We talk about listening to people and mirroring the language they use and not using language that we personally identify with. As someone with lived experience with substance misuse, I do not identify as an addict – that language does not resonate with me. Another example of this is whenever people talk about their services they insert God. I, personally, shut this out. I am not religious, but more spiritual with my indigenous ancestral practices. Be mindful of the language that you're using to describe your services. Remain open and inclusive and acknowledge that people may not resonate with the same things. My job is not to bring people to walk the same exact path that I am walking, it's to walk alongside them on the journey that they feel is going to be most useful for them.

Domingo Cruz: Lucrecia said it so well when she mentioned the mirror aspect. People then have to evaluate their belief structures, whether they're family traditions or whether they're

spiritual belief systems, when they're talking with someone. If they're not able to check their own bias or understanding and they double down on whatever they believe spiritually or culturally, they end up using that as judgment. You see that with faith; you see that with what we believe is right or wrong. We just stick to something instead of just exploring it with openness and seeing what works with that person and educating ourselves. If you want a recovery center that's more CBT focused, you can find it. If you want a recovery center that's focused on spirituality and is Christian based, you can find it. You can have a 12-step program. Help people find what works for them and their belief structure.

Shayna Micucci: In the Jewish faith, there is a lot of wine drinking for rituals and certain celebrations or holiday-related reasons. This is something that comes up often in conversations with other Jewish people about how that should be navigated better and differently. It has been a tricky conversation and one that I don't have an answer to, but it's a huge part of celebrating and participating in a lot of Jewish services and related events. I think it's something that I would bring back to my community to talk about more and think through. Obviously, for young children, they put out grape juice, but I don't think it's as normalized as it could be for an alternative, and we should be talking about moderation. I think it's the way it's framed. In Judaism, it's often framed as a ritual and part of celebration, so it has been very encouraged. I think other faiths have something similar where it would be important to think through about how we would do that differently or how would we do that without, in this case, alcohol, or how we support treatment or family care if this is an issue for someone in the home. How do we make our faith-based spaces more accessible to people who maybe shouldn't even be around drinking if that's a space that's unsafe or uncomfortable for them in their recovery? It's something that I, personally, stew on with some of my upbringing and think it needs more attention and conversation.

Tracey Ritter: I hear you on that, Shayna, in part because I think there needs to be more forward thinking. I come from a Catholic background. When I was raised, my parents and my family attended church, but not every single Sunday. However, if you know anything about the Catholic faith, it's very ritual and the steps are always the same as far as receiving communion. -- the body and blood, the wine and the bread. You bring up a point for those individuals in recovery who want to come to church, whether it be Catholic or any other faith-based community church. How can we support them best and not have that option available to them if they want to choose to receive Communion? Why can't it be non-alcohol wine?

Shayna Micucci: In my Consortium work trying to understand what the faith-based and cultural practices landscape looks like in Colorado in relation to substance use, we learned from the organizations we spoke to that education about substance misuse and overdose is needed. I am curious if participants in this meeting have other things they are aware of that might present an opportunity for training and education to help faith-based organizations be better prepared to support families and understand this issue.

Julie Wright: I actually love that idea. Shayna. One of our big things is lifelong learning. Like Tracey, I grew up Catholic, and I'm very familiar with the traditions and stigmas. Is there some sort of resource available that highlights how each particular faith-based organization views what is available for substance treatment? A lot of people my age grew up with AA as the only resource. One out of three people either experience substance use themselves, or know somebody who is struggling. There are so many people out there. It's very unusual that once you find somebody, that they don't know anybody else who is struggling.

Teresa Cobleigh: One of the problems we face in this country is that people who have substance use disorder don't always get help and in certain demographics -- and I believe this is true in the Black population -- one of the cultural barriers is a lack of trust. I'm hearing that faith-based organizations can, maybe not always, be a more trusted source. I see faith-based organizations as being very integral to a community safety net and definitely feel that there should be strong partnerships with organizations that can help raise awareness and reiterate the principles of the Golden Rule. I'm working with Unity Church on the idea of trying to think about how the church can mentor young people through their music department because sometimes you cannot reach youth by just saying don't do drugs. You have to build connections in the community with trusted adults, and if they meet them at church as part of a music program, it's a great way to stay connected to youth. I don't mean to be critical of churches -- I just feel there are missed opportunities in the community and would encourage churches to be active in this regard.

Announcements:

Stories in Black and White Exhibitions:

- August - Denver Health
- August - Pueblo (currently soliciting submissions)
- September - Gunnison (currently seeking submissions)
- October - Colorado Attorney General's Opioid Abatement Conference

Adjournment/next meeting date:

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m. The next work group meeting will be held on Thursday, November 19th from 12 to 1:30 p.m. (via Zoom). Sarah asked work group members to let her know if there are any topics they would like to learn more about.

Attachments: Work group roster