Step 3: Strategic planning

In this step, you will use the information obtained via your needs assessment to develop a strategic plan for addressing opioid misuse in your community. In this stage, you will do the following:

- Identify the intervening variables most relevant to and present within your community
- Select strategies that address your specific problem statement and show evidence of effectiveness for the populations you are trying to reach
- Define your desired outcomes
- Identify the resources needed for implementation
- Create a logic model that spells out the connections between the identified problem(s), intervening variables, strategies, and desired outcomes
- Create an action plan that outlines how you will implement your chosen strategies (a template is included in Appendix 10)

Each step in this process is described in more detail below. A strategic plan template is included in Appendix 10.

Prioritizing intervening variables

As noted in Step 1, intervening variables are factors identified in the literature as being related to opioid misuse, including risk and protective factors in your community. Identifying these factors and prioritizing among them is a critical part of the SPF planning process. While different criteria can be used to prioritize these variables, communities often use two in particular when making this decision: *importance*, the extent to which various intervening variables impact the problem in question, and *changeability*, how easy it may be to change the intervening variable. You may want to select intervening variables that are high in both.

When prioritizing intervening variables, it is also important to look at opioid misuse in a comprehensive way and consider the potential consequences of addressing one risk or protective factor versus another. For example, as noted in the Introduction, there is some evidence that reducing access to prescription opioids without reducing the demand for these drugs could increase the use of heroin. For each intervening variable you are considering, think about the potential for unintended consequences and ways to anticipate and address these issues.
Importance. When examining the data you have collected, ask yourself how important a particular factor is in addressing opioid misuse in your community. For example, if you identified youth misuse of prescription opioids as a problem and the data show that youth are more likely to obtain these drugs from peers (social access) than from parents (via unlocked medicine cabinets in their homes), then social access would be considered high in importance, whereas access through parents would be considered low.

When weighing the importance of intervening variables, consider the following:

- Does the intervening variable impact other behavioral health issues? For example, poor parental monitoring may be a risk factor for not only opioid misuse but also other behaviors, such as alcohol use and early sexual activity. Therefore, focusing on this risk factor may impact more than one issue.

- Do the intervening variables directly impact the specific developmental stage of those experiencing the problem? For example, if the identified problem is the misuse of opioids among 18–25 year olds, the risk factor of parental monitoring would be less important than it would be among 12–17 year olds.

Changeability. When assessing the changeability of a factor, you may want to consider the following:

- Whether the community has the capacity—the readiness and resources—to change a particular intervening variable
- Whether a suitable evidence-based intervention exists
- Whether change can be brought about in a reasonable time frame (i.e., changing some intervening variables may take too long to be a practical solution)

If the community has ample resources and sufficient readiness to address this intervening variable, if a suitable evidence-based intervention exists, and if change can occur within a reasonable time frame, then the factor would be considered high in changeability. If there are not adequate resources or the community is not ready to address the intervening variable, the changeability of the factor may be low.

Examples of intervening variables

The following are examples of factors that could help explain the opioid misuse problem in a community:

- Adolescents have easy access to opioid pain relievers that are prescribed for their parents and available in their homes
- Adolescents do not perceive the use of opioid prescription drugs as potentially harmful
- Heroin users who have an overdose fail to receive prompt treatment because bystanders are afraid of involving the police
- Former users have a low tolerance due to abstinence, incarceration in prison or jail, detoxification, treatment, and other periods of non-use of opioids

What factors help explain opioid misuse and its consequences in your community? Which ones are most important, and which ones are you most likely to be able to change?
Another factor you may want to consider is time lapse, or the amount of time between opioid misuse and its consequences. A short time lapse may make it easier for you to show a relationship between your activities and improved outcomes.

**Selecting evidence-based interventions**

In developing a plan to address opioid misuse in your community, it is important to identify and select strategies that have been shown to be effective, are a good fit for your community, and are likely to promote sustained change.

**Evidence of effectiveness.** Few studies have examined the effectiveness of interventions focused specifically on opioid misuse. As a result, traditional guidance about strategy selection (e.g., selecting interventions from Federal registries of evidence-based interventions) may be difficult to follow.

Literature reviews and best practice summaries may help you identify strategies that have been evaluated and that may be a good fit for your community. For example:

- A literature review summarizing the evidence in support of various strategies and interventions for addressing the nonmedical use of opioid drugs (CAPT, 2012c) is provided in Appendix 11. This document was developed by the Northeast CAPT under a contract with SAMHSA.
- This review identified strategies that showed some evidence of effectiveness; these findings are summarized in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Domain</th>
<th>Risk or Protective Factor (Intervening Variable)</th>
<th>Related Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Availability: Retail access</td>
<td>State-level prescription drug monitoring programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community norms favorable to drug use</td>
<td>Using mass media to increase public concern about use and to change normative perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Poor parental monitoring and supervision; low parental attachment or involvement/bonding</td>
<td>Improve parental monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor parental monitoring and supervision; clear disapproval of substance use</td>
<td>Parental training/intervention aimed at improving clear communication of disapproval of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor parental monitoring and supervision; clear disapproval of substance use</td>
<td>Parent and family training around family management and positive family interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 12 summarizes best practices from MassCALL2 grantees, regarding strategies for reducing unintentional fatal and nonfatal opioid overdoses.

These and other resources (e.g., other literature reviews, published studies, unpublished evaluation findings) may help you identify the strategies with the greatest potential to affect the intervening variables you identified as a priority.

For each strategy you consider:

- Review the research evidence that describes how the strategy is related to your selected intervening variable(s)
- Based on this evidence, present a rationale describing how the strategy addresses the intervening variable(s)

As described later in this section, this process will help you develop a logic model that shows how your selected strategies will lead to improvements in outcomes related to opioid misuse.

**Conceptual fit.** Think about how relevant the strategy is to your community and how it is logically connected to your intervening variable(s) and desired outcomes. To determine conceptual fit, consider the following questions:

- How has the strategy been tested with the identified target population? If it has not, how can it be applied to the target population?
- How will implementing this strategy in your local community help you achieve your anticipated outcomes?

**Practical fit.** Consider the practical fit of each strategy, or your current ability to effectively implement the selected strategy, given your community’s readiness, population, and general local circumstances. Consider the following:

- Resources (e.g., cost, staffing, access to target population)
- Organizational or coalition climate (e.g., how the strategy fits with existing prevention or reduction efforts, the organization’s willingness to accept new programs, buy-in of key leaders)
- Community climate (e.g., the community’s attitude toward the strategy, buy-in of key leaders)
- Sustainability of the strategy (e.g., community ownership, renewable financial support, community champions)

**Potential impact.** When selecting strategies, it is important to consider their comprehensiveness and potential for long-term impact. While strategies that are more narrow in focus (e.g., educating parents or health care providers) may be simpler to implement, approaches aimed at changing policies, systems, and environments (e.g., prescription drug monitoring programs, system-wide changes in how EDs treat opioid overdose) may be more likely to promote sustained improvement in outcomes.
Establishing outcomes for each strategy

For each selected strategy, you will need to establish measurable outcomes. To do so, identify the intervening variable(s) being addressed, indicate the strategy, and list anticipated short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. For example:

- **Intervening variables:** Poor parental monitoring and supervision of children, lack of clear parental disapproval of substance use
- **Strategy:** Communication campaign aimed at reaching 90 percent of parents of eighth grade students with information on the importance of communicating the harms of opioid misuse to their children
- **Outcomes:**
  - **Short-term:** Parents of eighth grade students believe opioid misuse is harmful
  - **Intermediate:** Parents of eighth-graders clearly communicate disapproval of opioid misuse to their children
  - **Long-term:** Decreased rates of opioid misuse among eighth grade youth

Identifying resources for implementation

Specify all resources needed to implement each selected strategy and measure the related outcomes. Consider the following:

- **Human resources:** (e.g., staffing, partnerships, volunteers, coalition membership)
- **Skills:** (e.g., data collection and analysis, prevention and intervention knowledge and skills)
- **Fiscal resources:** (e.g., monetary, in-kind)
- **Material resources:** (e.g., space, equipment)
- **Existing resource gaps that will limit your ability to effectively implement the selected strategy or strategies**

Three types of outcomes

- **A short-term** outcome is the change in the target group that received your strategy
- **An intermediate** outcome is the change in the intervening variable
- **A long-term** outcome is the ultimate impact of the strategy on the issue identified in your problem statement

Developing a logic model

A logic model is a chart that describes how your effort or initiative is supposed to work and explains why your intervention is a good solution to the problem at hand. Effective logic models depict the activities that will bring about change and the results you expect to see in your community. A logic model keeps program planners moving in the same direction by providing a common language and point of reference.

Logic models may be used for various purposes and can feature different elements—for example, logic models used in evaluation often list inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. In the context of the SPF, a logic model generally includes the following categories: