

Governor's Advisory Council on Opioids, Substance Use, and Addiction

2025 Letter from the council chairs

As the Chair and Co-Chair of the Governor's Advisory Council on Opioids, Substance Use, and Addiction, we are pleased to share the work of the council, now in its third year. 2025 was a year driven by discovery, insight, and collaboration among all council members. From statewide health standards to harm reduction and program integrity, together we used our voices to advise the subcabinet on a range of topics important to Minnesotans related to substance use. We acknowledge at the outset the uncertainty and disruption across communities due to recent federal government actions, including funding freezes and immigration crackdowns. These actions have destabilized community organizations and directly impacted the lives of those we serve. The federal changes, coupled with state-level challenges, have influenced our priorities and actions throughout the year.

Early in 2025, the council partnered with Imagine Deliver to shape a two-year strategic roadmap. Building on the council's continuing focus on justice-involved individuals and background studies reform, the session identified two new priority areas: **culturally responsive care and evidence-based ROSC (recovery-oriented system of care) Councils**. These priorities reflect the council's shared vision and align with its responsibilities to advise the subcabinet, represent diverse recovery communities, and carry out collective initiatives within and across our communities.

Throughout the year, we heard from policy and community stakeholders and advised on key subcabinet initiatives. We were grateful for the many guests who shared their knowledge and expertise, including:

- Jennifer Dugan, director of academic standards, instruction, and assessment, Department of Education, regarding statewide health standards, including education on substance use.
- Mark Sanders, program manager for Great Lakes ATTC, regarding Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care in Illinois (ROSCs).
- John Connolly, deputy commissioner, Department of Human Services/Medicaid Director, regarding Medicaid changes.
- Teresa Steinmetz, assistant commissioner, Department of Human Services, regarding Harm Reduction.
- Dr. KyleeAnn Stevens and Catherine Courcy, Direct Care and Treatment, and Weston Merrick from MMB, regarding civil commitment.
- Cathy tenBroeke, assistant commissioner and executive director, Minnesota Council on Homelessness, on Housing First.

Council members also worked to increase information sharing among its members, the public, and the Office of Addiction and Recovery. In September 2025, it supported Recovery Month activities across Minnesota. In October, the council participated in the **Minnesota Association of Resources for Recovery and Chemical Health (MARRCH)** conference. There, it raised awareness of its activities and gathered feedback on Minnesota's continuum of care for those affected by substance use disorders. With support from the Office of Addiction and Recovery, we also introduced a method for council members to share resources, events, and information about their organizations, broadening awareness of recovery efforts.

Council members recognize that ongoing uncertainty in federal and state affairs, including funding and policy shifts, poses challenges to the planning and implementation of policies that affect individuals, families, and communities impacted by substance use disorders. These governmental changes have required us to adapt our strategies and reinforce our commitment to addressing these and other key issues during unpredictable times:

- Program integrity and accountability
- Supporting cultural communities, which are also disproportionately impacted by substance use disorders, that are being targeted by ICE
- Advocating for culturally responsive care
- Evidence-based harm reduction
- Housing First
- Supporting justice-involved individuals
- Increasing access to Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)
- Acknowledging multiple access points for person-centered care
- Background studies reform
- Adolescent and family recovery support services

This list reflects our passion to serve Minnesotans impacted by substance use. We remain committed to working together, learning from each other, and supporting our organizations.

As we enter 2026, we continue to inform the subcabinet and lawmakers about the needs and experiences from our communities. We will remain a connection point for practitioners and community members, ensuring their first-hand experience has a seat at the table. And, most importantly, we will keep speaking up for a recovery-oriented future.

Wendy Jones
Chair

Colin Cash
Co-Chair

