

Identify Gaps and Needs



Good planning also means identifying what is missing or not working well.

Municipal leaders can use data, community experience, and partner feedback to identify gaps in overdose prevention, treatment referral, recovery support, and substance use health services. A clear understanding of unmet needs helps communities focus resources, close service gaps, and improve how people get connected to help.



Key Questions and Helpful Tips

Where are the biggest gaps in naloxone access, outreach, treatment referral, transportation, or follow-up care?

- Map where naloxone is and is not easy to get, especially in high-risk neighborhoods and settings.
- Review outreach coverage, post-overdose follow-up, treatment referral pathways, and transportation barriers.
- Ask where residents fall through the cracks between first contact and ongoing support.



Which residents face the greatest barriers to support?

- Identify populations most affected by overdose or least connected to care, such as youth, people experiencing homelessness, people leaving incarceration, or residents with limited transportation.
- Consider language, stigma, cost, housing instability, and family needs that make support harder to access.
- Use lived experience and community feedback to understand barriers that numbers alone may miss.



What municipal systems or policies need improvement?

- Review whether referral protocols, data sharing, communication, and cross-department coordination are working well.
- Examine policies, staff training, and operational practices that may delay or limit access to support.
- Identify practical improvements that can strengthen overdose prevention, service connection, and accountability.



Evidence of Success

These examples show what a strong process for identifying gaps and needs looks like in practice:

Service gaps identified

Leaders can clearly name where access or follow-up is weak.

Priority populations named

The community knows who faces the greatest barriers and needs focused support.

Barriers documented

Transportation, stigma, housing, and workflow barriers are described clearly.

Improvement opportunities selected

Partners agree on the most practical changes to pursue first.

Findings used for action

Gap information directly informs priorities, funding, and implementation.