

White House releases FY2026 budget request

by Eryn Hurley

The White House released the President's Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026, outlining the administration's proposals for budgetary spending for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025. The President's budget requests cutting non-defense discretionary funding by 23 percent, amounting to \$163 billion, and proposes a 7.6 percent spending cut to discretionary spending. This budget propos-



al reflects the administration's priorities but is unlikely to be passed in its current form and will need to be approved by Congress to be implemented.

NACo has compiled a breakdown of what changes would most directly impact county governments and our residents.

Top highlights for counties

- **Cuts to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) non-disaster grant programs**, representing an almost 20 percent decrease of the total FEMA grant portfolio.
- **Elimination of the Economic Development Admin-**

istration, which helps counties invest in infrastructure, workforce development and small business support to help bolster local economic prosperity and resilience.

- **Significant Cuts to Vital Housing Programs** such as the Community Development Block Grant; HOME Investment Partnerships Program; and the Pathways to Removing Obstacles Housing program.
- **Increased investment in critical infrastructure programs** including \$770 million for the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America grant program, \$400 million for rail safety grants and \$824 million for Federal Aviation Administration upgrades at airports—including county-owned airports—across the country.
- **Cuts to the Essential Air Service program**, which provides subsidized commercial air service in rural areas across the country, through changes to eligibility and subsidy rates.
- **Increased investment in critical infrastructure programs**, including \$824 million for Federal Aviation Administration upgrades at airports. This includes county-owned airports across the country.
- **Reduces U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development funding by \$721 million** and eliminates key

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One of 1,200 job seekers who showed up at a recent Montgomery County, Md. job fair geared to laid-off federal workers talks with a recruiter. Counties around the country are not only recruiting federal workers, but offering help in other ways. In all, more than 260,000 federal workers have been fired, taken buyouts or retired early, according to Reuters. Photo courtesy of Montgomery Community Media

Ongoing support crucial for counties to continue tackling overdose rates

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Opioid overdose rates are largely declining across the United States, but there's been a rise in polysubstance overdoses — meaning more people are dying of using fentanyl

mixed with other drugs, such as cocaine or methamphetamine, according to Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's vice dean for public health practice and community engagement.

Polysubstance use creates a

larger problem for treatment, because unlike fentanyl and opioids, there's no medication approved to treat stimulant use, Sharfstein told county commissioners May 1 at the NACo Large Urban County

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County official urges Congress to boost funding for EPA brownfields cleanup

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Congress should reauthorize, and increase funding for, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Program, which helps counties clean up and redevelop properties that have been exposed to hazardous substances or contaminants, as well as al-

low for more flexibility in how counties can spend the dollars, Oswego County, N.Y. Clerk Terry Wilbur said May 7 in his testimony on behalf of NACo, before Congress.

The presence of brownfield sites — which can be former industrial complexes, older public buildings or even smaller properties, such as former gas stations — can present

land use challenges and negatively affect property values, but if redeveloped, can provide counties with an opportunity to revitalize their economies and communities, Wilbur said in his address to members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Water Resources and Envi-

See BROWNFIELDS page 2



Oswego County, N.Y. County Clerk Terry Wilbur testifies, on behalf of NACo, before Congress on May 7, advocating for the reauthorization of the Brownfields Program.

EPA’s Brownfields Program is a ‘critical’ source of funding for counties

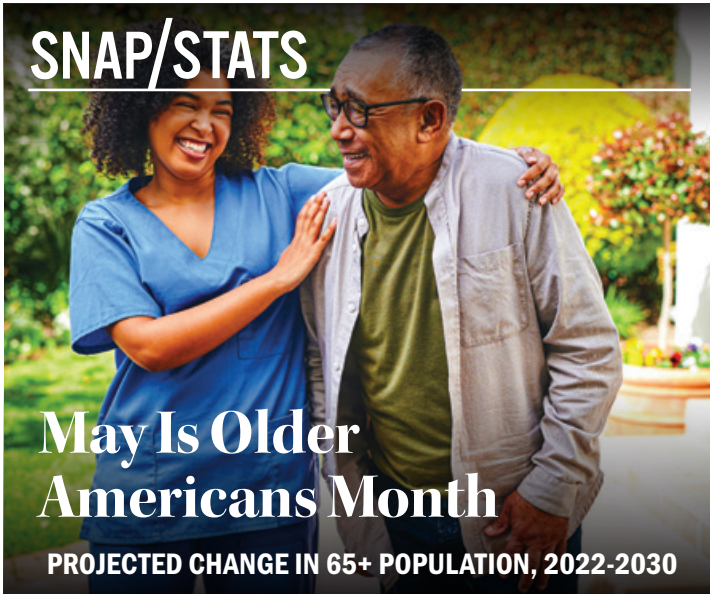
From BROWNFIELDS page 1 Brownfields Program has made over 10,800 sites ready for productive reuse, leveraged more than \$40.4 billion in ad-
ronment.
Since its inception, the

ditional cleanup and redevelop-
ment funding and helped to
create or leverage more than
270,000 jobs, said Rep. Mike
Collins (R-Ga.), chairman of
the Water Resources and Envi-
ronment Subcommittee, citing
EPA data.
The EPA program is “high-
ly effective” and a “critical”
source of funding for coun-
ties, which are “responsible for
protecting the environment,
ensuring public health and
strengthening the economic
vitality of our communities,”
Wilbur said.
While he represents a small-
er county, the funding is “crucial
for both urban and rural
counties,” Wilbur added.
The EPA has estimated there
are more than 450,000 brown-
field sites across the country;
125 of them are in Oswego
County.
Without the federal fund-
ing, Oswego County wouldn’t
have been able to identify its
brownfields or conduct the en-
vironmental site assessments
necessary for redevelopment
at several sites, Wilbur said.

Completed assessments and
projects in the county made
possible through the grant
funding include two housing
developments on the Oswego
Riverfront, which together cre-
ated 108 housing units and five
commercial leasing spaces,
with a total investment of \$30
million.
The county was also able to
use the federal funds to lever-
age additional grant funding
from the state to restore its his-
toric Oswego lighthouse.
EPA evaluations have shown
that over \$20 was leveraged
for each dollar of Brownfields
funds spent on investment and
cleanup activities in Ohio, said
Lisa Shook, assistant chief of
Ohio Environmental Protec-
tion Agency’s division of envi-
ronmental response and reme-
diation.
“The Brownfields program
is a great example of how en-
vironmental cleanup and eco-
nomic revitalization are not
competing priorities, but com-
plementary goals that can help
build a stronger future for all
Americans,” she said.

On behalf of NACo, Wilbur
recommended increasing the
cleanup grant ceiling to \$1 mil-
lion and the flexibility to award
up to \$2 million, to allow com-
munities to clean more sites
and account for the complexity
of the cleanup process.
Wilbur also advocated for
increasing the administrative
cap on Brownfields Program
grants, which would allow
counties to use a portion of
their funding to cover admin-
istrative costs, as it’s often dif-
ficult for understaffed and un-
der resourced rural counties to
“complete these complex grant
applications or to comply with
burdensome reporting,” he
said.
There’s only one account-
ant who works on the process
in Oswego County, Wilbur
noted.
“We’re a small county with
under 1,000 employees, and
we’re actually, I would say, one
of the larger rural counties if
you will,” Wilbur said. “And as
you get smaller and smaller,
there’s less staff you have to be
able to devote to this.”

SNAP/STATS



May Is Older Americans Month

PROJECTED CHANGE IN 65+ POPULATION, 2022-2030

STATE	INCREASE BY 2030
Arizona	41%
Florida	39%
Nevada	37%
Texas	28%
Georgia	27%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau via seniorliving.org

‘The old way of thinking of drug treatment is when people are ready, they’ll show up’

From Lucc page 1

Caucus fly-in in Washington, D.C.

The best treatment option for polysubstance use is “contingency management,” which is when someone with substance use disorder is given an incentive, such as money, for not using, Sharfstein said. While it might be a controversial approach, data shows that it’s effective and that a punitive approach to recovery programs — for example, someone getting kicked out of a program for missing a session or failing a drug test — only leads to more overdoses, Sharfstein said.

Reduce stigma

Working to reduce the stigma of substance use and recovery is important, particularly when it comes to housing, he added.

“Housing that says you can’t be on buprenorphine or methadone, that’s housing that’s making people choose between their recovery and having a roof over their heads,” Sharfstein said. “Transportation to be able to get around, particularly to treatment and to jobs, and employment, becomes extremely important for recovering, but treatment should continue well into recovery.”

Xylazine, a sedative commonly referred to as “tranq,” doesn’t cause overdoses, but people who use it often get wounds, which can cause serious health complications, so counties should build a wound program and teach those who manage drug treatment programs how to recognize and treat the wounds, in addition to offering xylazine test strips to users, Sharfstein said.

Mobile nursing teams are also an effective way for counties to address xylazine wounds, according to Daniel Cao, healthcare policy aide for Santa Clara County, Calif. Supervisor Otto Lee.

Secretary Akbar Hossain, who works in the Office of Policy and Planning for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, echoed that sentiment, adding that Pennsylvania works with the University of Pennsylvania to send out nursing teams across areas with high rates of

substance use.

Wayne County, Mich. partnered with Wayne State University to launch its Narcan vending machines. While counties are at the center of overdose prevention efforts, they often operate with limited and narrowly scoped federal resources, needing long term, flexible funding, not just short-term pilots. Urban counties in particular need policies that reflect their complexity.

Target demographics

While overdoses are down overall, Native Americans and older Black men are experiencing rising rates of overdose deaths, according to Jenna Bluestein, Pew Charitable Trusts’ behavioral health officer of government relations. In Maryland, the highest rates are among young Hispanic men, according to Michael Coury, director of communications for the Maryland Office of Overdose Response.

Counties should assess data on the demographic groups that are disproportionately suffering the effects of substance use and overdoses and perform outreach and incentivize treatment among that population, according to Sharfstein.

“When you take a step back, you see a lot of the services, particularly the outreach services, are not necessarily di-

rected to places where that population may be,” Sharfstein said. “Senior centers may not have an outreach worker who’s doing harm reduction or helping to get people to treatment or talking to people, so this is a population that if you haven’t looked at it in your jurisdiction, it’s probably a very good idea to do that and to really kick the tires of the response to see whether it’s reaching.”

Most people with substance use disorder still have trouble accessing treatment, Sharfstein said. In Pennsylvania, Black people are 2.5 times more likely than white people to die by overdose, but less than 13% of Black people with substance use disorder have any evidence of treatment, according to Hossain, who added that the state is working to provide more access to treatment in vulnerable communities.

In some cases, state law precludes recovery programs from utilizing methadone, but maximizing access to the drug is “extraordinarily effective” in supporting recovery, according to Sharfstein.

“The rules for how methadone programs work have totally changed at the federal level, and that provides a lot more flexibility,” Sharfstein said. “You can pretty much wipe out the lines that are outside methadone programs if they are em-

bracing the new rules, if they’re doing more take-home therapy, if they’re using telemedicine, there are a whole bunch of things that can be done.”

During this presidential administration, there’s a “great opportunity to overlap with treatment,” but harm reduction isn’t going to be “the easiest conversation,” Sharfstein said.

Sharfstein encouraged county emergency services to start treatment immediately in overdose response, administering Naloxone (also known as Narcan) and following it up with a high dose of buprenorphine (which is used to treat opioid use disorder). A study showed there’s a five-fold increase in substance users following up on treatment if they’re administered buprenorphine, he said.

“Let’s say I’ve overdosed, and I’m then saved by Naloxone,” he said. “I’m thrown into the worst withdrawal right there. I wake up. Everyone’s staring at me. I probably have soiled myself. It’s not a great moment, and all I want is to get rid of that feeling of withdrawal, and I might go out and use right away. If you give buprenorphine, you actually calm that.”

Meet them

The three most effective places to engage people with substance use treatment are in ambulances, hospitals and


the justice system, according to Sharfstein.

“The old way of thinking about drug treatment is that when people are ready, they’ll show up,” he said. “But the new way is to say, ‘Everywhere you can possibly engage someone, you should engage people.’”

Counties should provide quicker treatment in jails and prisons, and offer it to everyone, Sharfstein said.

“Jails, traditionally in the United States, have been overdose factories,” Sharfstein said. “People withdraw from opioids when they’re in there, they come out, they use drugs again, and they’ve lost their tolerance, and they die. If you can give people treatment, as many people coming through as you can, you are interrupting that ... and then if you put resources at the transition from jail out into the community, you’re really using that arrest as an opportunity to help people.”

It’s important for counties to remember that declining overdose rates won’t just continue without sustained investment in treatment and recovery programming, Sharfstein said.

“We’re driving overdose rates down — overdose rates just aren’t falling,” Sharfstein said. “We shouldn’t assume that it’s like the weather, there are things that we’re doing to have that impact.” 



Dr. Joshua Sharfstein discusses overdose data and trends May 1 at the NACo Large Urban County Caucus fly-in. Photo by Bryan Dozier

Proposed federal mandates cloud opioid treatment

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Following a series of proposed federal mandates that would change how counties tackle substance use disorder, a policy expert provided an overview on what's to come and panelists shared the importance of collaboration in recovery work at NACo's Opioid Solutions Leadership Network peer exchange held in Washington, D.C. on May 1.

Regina LaBelle, director of the center on addiction policy for Georgetown University's O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law, shared an update of what changes, and proposed changes, to health and human services have come out of the Trump Administration in its first 100 days.

Changes include the reduction of 20,000 full-time Department of Health and Human Services employees, the rescission of \$11 billion in COVID-19 relief grants (which is subject to litigation) and the termination of numerous grants coming out of the National Health Institute that deal with diversity, equity and inclusion, many of which are related to HIV and addiction, according to LaBelle.

Additional proposed changes through the Office of National Drug Control Policy's drug policy priorities, which it released on April 1, include cutting first responder training for Naloxone and programs that support recovery treatment services for youth, the unhoused and pregnant and parenting women, she added.

"There's a lot up in the air," LaBelle said. "The only thing I would say is that counties and cities, this is where the rubber hits the road — you're going to feel it first. And I know that members of Congress really are anxious to hear from you."

The future of Section 1115 Medicaid waivers, which allow states to provide medication-assisted treatment to incarcerated individuals with substance use disorder prior to re-entry, is unknown at the time, LaBelle said. No existing waivers have been rescinded, but no new waivers have been approved during this



A panelist May 1 discusses how counties can better tackle substance use disorder, in a meeting at NACo. Photo by Bryan Dozier

administration, she added.

Medicaid expansion was a "game-changer" for Seattle and King County, Wash., and it being up-in-the-air makes the future unknown for the area's most vulnerable population, said Brad Finegood, a strategic advisor for King County, Wash. Public Health.

Medicaid expansion "allowed people to get basic baseline services that they were never able to get before," Finegood said.

"We know that about 50% of the people who die in Seattle and King County are either living unsheltered or they're in the homeless service system, so we know that people who are really low income are impacted by our really toxic drug supply. And so, that's a big unknown, because if people get that service taken away, that's huge."

While overdoses are going down in recent years nationally, substance use is an ongoing fight that counties must face and continue to tackle head-on, according to LaBelle.

"Even in the face of reduced overdose death rates, we can't let up," LaBelle said.

"It's still ridiculous. The number is ridiculous. And this is

not success. This is a bipartisan issue — it's always been bipartisan, and it needs to remain bipartisan, and we have to be consistent."

Neighboring counties sometimes have a "black wall," in which they don't, or rarely, coordinate or communicate with each other, which can prevent progress, said Walworth County, Wis. Supervisor Brian Holt. Coordinating with surrounding counties leads to better programming and better outcomes — Walworth County worked with the nearby counties of Jefferson, Rock and Waukesha on its substance use analysis, and it provided a better picture data-wise of what the priorities in the area were than if it were focused on a singular county, Holt said.

"I'm in a border county, we border Illinois, and there's very little to no communication across the border there, but people don't operate that way," Holt said. "That's not how traffic patterns are or movement patterns, or where people choose to live, or even where the flow of substances is. What you can do to coordinate with your surrounding counties is a huge ad-

vantage."

Collaboration is "key," echoed Amanda Peters, director of the Northern Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy. The Office is part of a prevention hub that brings together social and case workers, law enforcement, jail staff and housing coordinators to address substance use in the community, she said.

"Something that we like to do and say is 'public policy can be improved by better public health and public safety — how do we marry all of that together?'" Peters said.

"Because this is a public safety and public health issue, and it's also a private health issue ... We're looking at building a recovery-oriented system of care and making that spectrum from prevention all the way to reentry."

Federal funding needs to be more flexible, Peters said. With opioid use declining on the whole, it's important to have funding to also combat polysubstance use and alcoholism, the latter of which is the biggest problem in her community, she noted.

"So many things are so rigid, of what you can't fund and what

you can," Peters said. "And it should really be tailored to the local community, depending on who your partners are and what you need ... We need to be able to target opioids, but as the drug trends change, we need to be able to adapt in that way, to look at strategies that work for our local communities."

Finegood said that the Trump administration's focus on deregulation could benefit access to medication-assisted treatment.

"This federal administration is about deregulation, reportedly, and so there's a number of places where deregulation, I think, can really help making access to methadone, to long-acting injectable medication a lot easier in the field where people are," Finegood said.

"And especially with Medicaid providing more local flexibility on what Medicaid can do and how it can serve people, because so many regulation services have to be encountered in a certain way in a certain location that it makes it really hard to get to those who are suffering most, which are those vulnerable out in the field, often living unsheltered." **CN**

Top highlights for counties in White House FY 2026 budget request

From BUDGET page 1

- programs supporting rural housing, broadband, water systems and public facilities.
- **Establishes a new \$100 million Rural Financial Award Program**, offering competitive funding to improve financial infrastructure and expand capital access in underserved rural areas
 - **Cuts nearly \$1.4 billion from U.S. Forest Service operations**, scaling back federal support for wildfire mitigation, forest health, forest product research & development, recreation and watershed protection.
 - **Ends \$291 million in discretionary awards for the Community Development**

- Financial Institutions Fund**, limiting rural communities' ability to expand access to capital, support small businesses and drive local economic growth.
- **Eliminates \$3.6 billion in funding for six regional commissions**, cutting off place-based federal investment in distressed rural regions outside the Appalachian Regional Commission's footprint.
 - **Elimination of FEMA's Shelter and Services Program**, which provides funding to counties to offset the costs of food, shelter and other supportive services for migrants.

- **Elimination of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program**, which helps low-income households pay their heating and cooling bills.
- **Elimination of the Community Services Block Grant**, which supports local agencies in designing and implementing anti-poverty programs.
- **Reduces the U.S. Department of Education's budget** by \$12 billion but preserves Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act funding.
- **Reductions to the Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds**, which would impact counties' ability to

- maintain and improve water infrastructure without raising rates for residents.
- **Cuts to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency**, which impacts technical services provided to state and local governments through programs like the Multi-State/Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center.
 - **Reductions to the U.S. Department of Health and Human services**, reducing the budget by 26 percent from FY 2025 and impacting agencies like the National Institute of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
 - **Cuts to the Health Re-**

- sources and Services Administration**, which includes a \$74 million reduction in non-clinical Ryan White HIV/AIDS activities, a \$274 million cut to Maternal and Child Health programs and a \$1 billion cut to health workforce training and scholarships.
- **New \$500 million request for the "Make America Healthy Again" initiative**, aimed at improving nutrition, reducing reliance on medications and strengthening food and drug safety. [CN](#)

Eryn Hurley is the managing director, Government Affairs at NACo and NACo Federal Fellowship Initiative; Emma Conover, legislative assistant, contributed to this report.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

TONI PAPPAS

NACo Board Member
Hillsborough County, N.H.
Chair, Board of Commissioners


Number of years active in NACo: I am current (and former) Board member and have been active in NACo for over 20 years. I serve on the Arts and Culture Commission, the Health Steering Committee, the Rural Action Committee, the Membership Committee, the Nominating Committee and Women of NACo.

Years in public service: Prior to becoming a county commissioner, I served one year in the 1984 New Hampshire Constitutional Convention and six years as a New Hampshire state legislator.

Occupation: I am a senior account executive for the New Hampshire American Legion Legionnaire Magazine.

Education: Bachelor of Arts in English from Rutgers University.

The hardest thing I've ever done: Was bury my beloved husband, Billy. We used to enjoy attending NACo conferences together. Some may remember how he loved to dance at NACo receptions. He is always in my heart.



PAPPAS

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Susan B. Anthoney, President Ronald Reagan and the first female Boston marathoner, Kathrine Switzer.

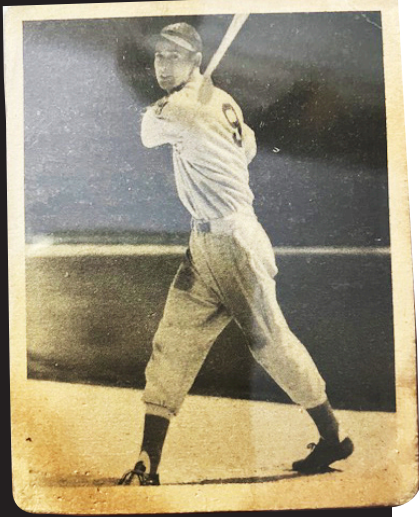
A dream I have is to: Continue my public service until the end of my life.

- The most adventurous thing I have ever done:** Occurred during the 1984 Summer Olympics, when I carried the Olympic Torch in Ogden, Utah while it was transported across the country to Los Angeles. Also, for fun, my husband and I ran a portion of the original ancient marathon route during the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece. I love the Olympics because every four years people come together to celebrate athletic achievements while setting aside political and cultural differences.
- My favorite way to relax is:** Go to the beach or practice yoga.
- I'm most proud of:** "My Big Fat Greek Family."
- Every morning, I read:** My local newspaper and *The New York Times*.

- My favorite meal is:** Lamb shank, Greek pilaf, Spanakopita with Baklava for dessert.
- My pet peeve is:** Disrespectful people with poor manners.
- My motto is:** "Inhale the future. Exhale the past," by Eckhart Tolle
- The last book I read is:** "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck. Written in 1939, it explores the same issues we face today.
- My favorite movie is:** "Rear Window" directed my Alfred Hitchcock.
- My favorite music is:** Jazz.
- My favorite U.S. president is:** Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who was pivotal in protecting and establishing some of America's beautiful National Parks.
- My county is a NACo member because:** We know NACo

strongly advocates for federal policy priorities in a non-partisan manner. We appreciate the ability to network with people in counties throughout the USA who deal with similar issues. We easily access experts for help with topics that impact our communities. We save time and money through various NACo programs.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Recently discovered a treasure of 52 vintage 1939 baseball cards hidden in my barn. I believe they were squirreled away by my husband when he was a young boy. He probably played with them, traded them off with other kids or dreamed he would someday be a great athlete. The collection includes a rookie card of famed Boston Red Sox player Ted Williams. It has value. My husband did achieve athletic fame, so the cards are a precious reminder of his legacy.



ON THE MOVE

NACo MEMBERS

• Former NACo President **Sallie Clark**, formerly an El Paso County, Colo. commissioner, was appointed Colorado state director for U.S. Rural Development. Former Box Elder County, Utah Commissioner **Stan Summers** was appointed Utah state director for U.S. Rural Development.

NACo STAFF

• Inter-governmental Affairs and Partner Engagement Director **Rick Hart** attended the Evolve AI Summit in New York City.

• National Program Director **Cathy Muse** attended the New York State Association of Municipal Purchasing Officials Annual Conference in Warren County.

GET TO KNOW...

Lincoln County, Okla.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Established in 1891, Lincoln County, Okla., was named for President Abraham Lincoln. The county was originally a part of the Creek Nation and later settled by the Sac and Fox, Iowa, Kickapoo and Pottawatomie Native Americans.

In 1895, the Kickapoo ceded their tribal claims to the land due to the federal policy of allotment, which broke up tribal lands and opened up large portions of it for white settlement. The additional land resulted in the last of the Oklahoma land rush. The county seat of Chandler is one of only two towns in Oklahoma that had its own land run or “rush,” because surveyors weren’t finished in time for it to be part of the countywide race. Gunshots kicked off the race, which featured thousands of people running on foot or riding on horseback, rushing to claim plots of land in the 320-acre town.

Chandler was deemed the “Pecan Capital of the World” by the state legislature in 1949, due to its significant production and processing of the nut.

Another claim to fame for Chandler is the Chandler Baseball Camp that was once the largest baseball camp for boys in the country, attracting players from around the world. The camp operated for 42 years, closing in

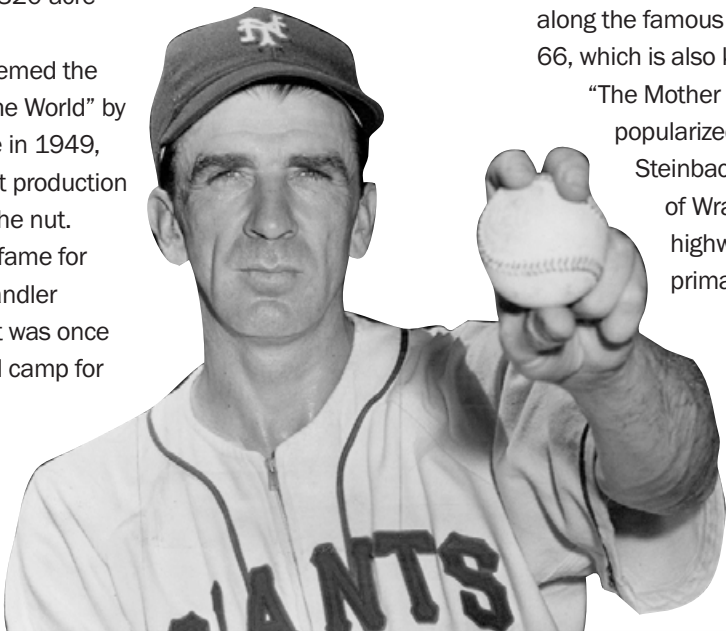
2000 after the death of Tom Belcher, who ran the camp. The property is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Notable alumni include Hall-of-Fame quarterback Troy Aikman and broadcaster Joe Simpson, who played professional baseball for 12 seasons.

A famous incident that took place in the county is billed as the last Old West gunfight in Oklahoma. It took place in 1924, when former Lincoln County Sheriff Bill Tilghman was shot and killed by a drunk prohibition officer. Tilghman was best known for capturing the notorious outlaw Bill Doolin during his time as a deputy U.S. Marshal; he also served as a state senator and Oklahoma City police

chief. As a teen, he worked as a buffalo hunter. After his death, Tilghman was buried in Chandler, where a city park is named after him, and he was inducted into the Hall of Great Westerners at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

There are plenty of recreational opportunities in the county, including the county’s Bell Cow Lake Trail System which provides opportunities to hike, bike and horseback ride, and visitors can camp and boat at Bell Cow Lake and Equestrian Campground.

Chandler is one of the cities along the famous U.S. Route 66, which is also known as “The Mother Road,” as popularized in John Steinbeck’s “Grapes of Wrath.” The highway was the primary route for the migration of farm workers



from the Midwest to California during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and has become a symbol for the pursuit of the American Dream.

Iconic media references to Route 66 include Jack Kerouac’s book “On the Road,” the Eagles’ song “Take it Easy” and the film “Easy Rider,” among others. Chandler is home to numerous attractions related to the famous highway, including The Route 66 Interpretive Center, the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Museum and Hall of Fame and The Lincoln County Museum of Pioneer History. Visitors can also see some of the bikes that have traveled on Route 66 dating back to 1908 at the Seaba Station Motorcycle Museum.

Notable Lincoln County natives include composer Roy Harris and **Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Carl Hubbell, the latter of whom has a museum in his hometown of Meeker. The Carl Hubbell Museum is located in the Meeker City Hall building, and features memorabilia and awards from throughout his 16-season career with the New York Giants. Nicknamed “the Meal Ticket” and “King Carl,” Hubbell is considered one of the greatest left-handed pitchers in baseball history and was known for his screw-ball.**

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.



SAN JUAN COUNTY, WASH.

Accessible primarily by ferry routes, the majority of San Juan County’s population lives on the four largest of the 743 islands and rocks that make up the county.

The San Juan Islands were the subject of a territorial dispute between Great Britain and the United States from 1846-1872, leading to the Pig War in 1859. The bloodless conflict ended through arbitration, led by Kaiser Wilhelm I, which awarded the islands to the United States.

The seal features orca whales, common in the Salish Sea in which the county’s island lie.



It also features a sailboat and an eagle, noteworthy because San Juan County has the largest population of bald eagles outside of Alaska.

Would you like to see your seal featured in County News? Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.



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February 21, 2026
March 21, 2026
April 18, 2026
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WORD
SEARCH

PENNINGTON COUNTY, S.D.

Created by Mary Ann Barton

CUSTER: Gen. George Custer visited the county in 1874, taking an expedition to Black Elk Peak.

DAKOTA: The county is located in South Dakota.

FEDERAL: The county was the site of the first federal court west of the Missouri River.

GATEWAY: The county seat is known as the Gateway to the Black Hills.

GOLD: The discovery of gold in 1874 sparked a major gold rush, leading to the creation of the county in 1875.

HOCKEY: The Rapid City Rush hockey team was founded in 2008.

NEWSPAPER: *The Rapid City Journal* is the region's daily newspaper, founded in 1878.

PEAK: The county's Black Elk Peak is the highest point in North America east of the Rocky Mountains, standing at 7,242 feet.

PENNINGTON: The county was named for John L. Pennington, the fifth governor of the Dakota Territory.

POPULATION: The county population was 109,222 in the 2020 Census and estimated at more than 115,000 in 2024.

RAPID: The county seat is Rapid City, known as the "City of Presidents," due to life-size bronze presidential statues located there. It is named for Rapid Creek.

RESTAURANT: One of the oldest restaurants in the area is Tally's Silver Spoon, which got its start in the 1930s, when it was called The Bright Spot Café.

RUSHMORE: Mount Rushmore is located in the county, featuring 60-foot heads carved in the mountainside, of Presidents George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt.

SIoux: The Sioux Indian Museum is located in Rapid City. The Sioux's Lakota people currently make up 10% of the county population.

WIR: The county is the location for the 2025 NACo Western Interstate Region Conference.

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SPONSORED CONTENT

PRIORITIZING MENTAL HEALTH

A Call to Action for County Professionals

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, an opportune moment for county professionals to reflect on the importance of mental wellbeing within our workplaces and communities. As frontline providers of public services, county employees frequently encounter high-stress situations that can impact their health both personally and professionally. Addressing mental health proactively is not only beneficial for individual employees but also enhances the overall effectiveness and resilience of county services.

The Imperative to Focus on Mental Health

Recent data underscores the pressing need for mental health initiatives in the workplace. According to employment platform Monster.com,



40% of employees report that their jobs have a negative impact on their mental health. Furthermore, the World Health Organization estimates that 12 billion working days are lost annually due to depression and anxiety, resulting in a \$1 trillion loss in productivity. For county professionals, these statistics highlight the critical need to foster a supportive work environment that prioritizes mental wellbeing.

Four Strategies to Advance Mental Health

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing suggests four strategies for county professionals to enhance mental health awareness and support:

- 1. Advocate for Change:** Engage in open dialogues about mental health within your departments and with elected officials. Champion policies that promote mental health resources and reduce stigma.
- 2. Prioritize Self-care:** Recognize the importance of self-care routines. Encourage practices that support mental wellbeing, such as regular breaks, mindfulness exercises and access to counseling services.
- 3. Celebrate Mental Wellbeing:** Acknowledge and share successes related to mental health initiatives. Highlight stories of resilience and recovery to inspire and educate colleagues.

covery to inspire and educate colleagues.

- 4. Get Involved with Mental Health First Aid (MHFA):** Participate in a MHFA training, administered by the National Council, to equip yourself and your team with the skills necessary to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among peers and constituents.

MHFA Training: A Valuable Resource for County Employees

MHFA is a research-informed, skills-based training program that's tailored to provide individuals with the tools to recognize and respond to someone who may be experiencing mental health or substance use challenges.



stance use challenges. By integrating MHFA training into county workplaces, employees will gain the skills to support their own mental health and that of their colleagues and community members, fostering a culture of understanding and resilience.

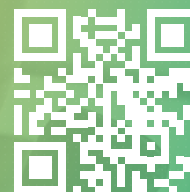
Taking the Next Steps

As county professionals dedicated to serving communities, it is imperative to lead by example in prioritizing mental health. By advocating for supportive policies, engaging in self-care, celebrating mental wellbeing and participating in a MHFA training, we can create healthier work environments and more effective public services.

For more information on MHFA training for county employees, visit MHFA.org/NACo. Together, we can make mental wellbeing a reality for everyone in our communities.

May is

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH



Scan to learn more

BRIGHT IDEAS | HOWARD COUNTY, MD.

Maryland County Program Analyzes Data, Seeks Community Input to Create Comprehensive Growth Plan

PROBLEM:

As the county grew, it became more diverse, and more input was needed from the community to help plan the county's future.

SOLUTION:

The county created HoCo By Design, that analyzes data and engages the community.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer



Howard County, Md.'s HoCo By Design comprehensive plan used data analysis and community engagement to steer the focus of the growing county's future — identifying priorities such as building more affordable housing, mitigating climate change and expanding transportation access — with an equitable lens.

A new comprehensive plan is created each decade and guides how the county will develop over time, detailing areas such as land use, housing and economic development. For its HoCo By Design comprehensive plan, Howard County brought in a consulting team and multiple sub-consultants to help assess existing conditions of key areas — such as agriculture, market economics and ecological health — and provide recommendations for potential policies the county could implement moving forward to improve them, according to Mary Kendall, deputy director of Howard County's Department of Planning and Zoning. That analysis was then shared with the public for feedback.

One of the things that sets HoCo By Design apart from previous county comprehensive plans is the level of community engagement, Kendall said. Over the course of three-and-a-half years, Howard County held nearly 100 public meetings, in which people gave feedback on early versions of the plan and shared priorities they wanted the county to invest in moving forward.

"The socioeconomic demographics in the county continuously change and this is a plan that really does set the path forward for how we grow, where we grow, what we preserve," Kendall said. "And for anybody who lives here and is planning to live here in the future, they need to be a part of those recommendations, that policy direction."

"Things like the types of

'We have a very diverse community, and we want to make sure that all those voices are represented.'

homes that we want to try to encourage we build in the future and who can afford to live there — those are all really important decisions and guidance that we need the public and the community to help inform."

Priorities identified by the community in feedback sessions included housing affordability, the public school system, climate change resiliency and mitigation and providing more alternative modes of transportation, according to Kendall.

"We are a maturing suburban county with urban pockets," Kendall said. "So, there are a lot of residents who really want to improve means of, alternative modes of, transportation, so that they can get from point A to point B safely."

The final plan recommended improving regional connectivity, and earlier this month, the expansion of the regional Flash Bus Rapid Transit system between Howard and Montgom-

ery counties, which will launch next year, was announced.

"We are delivering on this vision to deliver strong transit connections that are vital to supporting the needs of our residents, workforce and businesses," Howard County Executive Calvin Ball said in a press statement. "We know that to build a resilient and inclusive future, we must invest in affordable, ef-

ficient and high-quality public transportation that meets the needs of our community."

In December 2023, a county Office of Agriculture launched, in response to a recommendation from the general plan to create one to focus more intentionally on the county's agricultural preservation and production, according to Kendall.

"Nearly 40% of our land is permanently preserved through an agricultural or preservation easement or an open space or parkland, so out in the western part of the county, a lot of that's farmland, so we have a very healthy agricultural economy," Kendall said. "... And in recognition of that, the [Office] relates to the environment and how we operate as a government to better meet the needs of our farming community."

HoCo By Design outlined the importance of preserving the county's character, while creating opportunities for more diverse

housing types, including more affordably priced town homes, duplexes and multiplexes.

Howard County currently has "inclusionary zoning," requiring a minimum number of affordable units in new residential developments, but the next step is for the county to undergo a rezoning process, so that a range of small- to medium-size home choices, available at different price points, and compatible in scale and character, can be allowed in more zoning districts, according to Kendall. The county also established an Affordable Housing Working Group to brainstorm ways to incentivize affordable housing beyond inclusionary zoning requirements.

"Thanks to this policy direction that we have in this general plan, with such an equity lens, what we've been able to do is get this policy agenda out there," Kendall said. "And now we have more advocates in the community that are joining our various committees that are giving recommendations to the council and the executive, and we have county council members who are looking at how they can start to change legislation so that we can all start to advance some of these affordable housing goals."

Between 2010 and 2022, Howard County outpaced both Maryland's and the national growth rate, increasing its population by more than 16%. As the county's population grows, getting creative with land use was identified as a necessity in its path forward. HoCo By Design iden-

tifies mixed-use redevelopment opportunities, including single-use shopping centers with large parking lots. An 1,100-acre office park is one of the primary areas the county has identified for mixed-use redevelopment, according to Kendall.

"In the past, we've done some mixed-use redevelopment, that might only be realized on one single property or two properties adjacent to each other, but there might not be enough residential density to support the retail," Kendall said. "So, we tried to find places where you might be able to get a little more development, a little more density, and they're places that also might only have a single use."

In addition to its community feedback sessions, Howard County established a planning advisory committee that brought together 33 stakeholders, subject matter experts and community members to meet with the Department of Planning and Zoning and share their ideas throughout the planning process. The planning advisory committee helped the department identify planning themes that reflected community needs and target areas for mixed-use development opportunities, according to Kendall.

HoCo By Design is the first comprehensive plan in Howard County to explicitly bring an equity, diversity and inclusion lens, Kendall said. In the past decade, the county shifted from having a majority white population to its population now being primarily people of color.

"Ensuring that we had a variety of voices that tried to reflect the diversity that is in this county was really critical to the process," Kendall said. "We have a very diverse community, and we want to make sure that all those voices are represented and reflected and heard through the planning process." **CN**

The Howard County program won the 2024 NACo Best in Category Achievement Award in the Planning category.

CALIFORNIA

• The **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** Sheriff's Department is launching a new public safety campaign titled "Emergency Lights? Pull to the Right," KNBC-TV reported.

The initiative is designed to **educate drivers** on the importance of remaining alert and taking proper action when emergency vehicles are nearby. California law mandates that motorists must pull to the right and stop when emergency vehicles approach with their lights and sirens activated. Sheriff Robert Luna emphasized the campaign's urgency, noting that many drivers either hesitate or completely disregard the presence of emergency vehicles. "This campaign is about saving lives by making sure every driver knows how to react when they see those flashing lights in their rearview mirror," he stated.

The campaign outlines several key steps that drivers should follow to ensure the safe passage of emergency vehicles. These include keeping music at a reasonable volume and staying free of distractions to detect sirens and flashing lights, pulling to the right safely and signaling when doing so, stopping and waiting until the emergency vehicle passes and avoiding blocking intersections. LASD will disseminate educational

content through social media and public service announcements to raise awareness and promote compliance.

• With falls

emerging as one of the leading causes of injury and death among **older adults**, **PLACER COUNTY** is launching a new campaign aimed at reducing risks



CALIFORNIA

• A way for **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** residents to virtually **track pollution** from the Tijuana River in South County recently went live, providing a real time update on beach water quality and sewage odor, KPBS reported.

The interactive dashboard can be accessed at <https://tjdashboard.netlify.app/>, and it compiles data from multiple websites with the intention of providing more frequent updates to the frequently changing information.

Odor complaints and hydrogen sulfide levels for communities near the river valley are provided by the regional Air Pollution Control District. It was developed with UC San Diego's Resilient Shield, a team "collaborating to integrate advanced computing techniques like forecast modeling to facilitate informed decision making," according to a county statement.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



FLORIDA

• **ALACHUA COUNTY** recently announced that it has launched its "**Road Projects**" website to keep residents informed on the progress of ongoing road work and upcoming projects. The digital resource will highlight the county's Transportation Capital Improvement Program, which is a \$250 million, 10-year initiative funded from a Wild Spaces & Public Places surtax, gas tax, property taxes and state and federal grants.

The program will not only feature road upgrades, but also include improved traffic signals, multi-use trails, new sidewalks and safer pedestrian crossings.

and raising awareness across the community, the *Sierra Sun* reported. The effort comes as part of the county's Healthy Aging Program, which debuted earlier this year and focuses on supporting seniors through education, outreach and expanded access to resources.

In five years, 369 county residents have died due to fall-related injuries, 77 in the last year alone. Adults 85 and older are at highest risk and those living with dementia fall at twice the rate of others their age.

"This campaign is about saving lives by sharing practical steps every family can take," said Megan Sponholtz, program coordinator, Senior Health Education for the county. "Falls are not an inevitable part of aging — they're preventable."

FLORIDA

• Curious about what goes on behind closed doors at your county's departments? **ST. JOHNS COUNTY** is peeling back the curtain with the launch of their **new video se-**

ries, Inside SJC, Hoodline.com reported. The series kicked off with an episode that delves into the inner workings of the St. Johns County Public Library System.

Titled "Secrets of the Shelves," the inaugural episode was released in conjunction with National Library Week, and it promises to give residents an up-close look at how the library curates their vast collection and assists the community in discovering the books they need.

The initiative behind Inside SJC isn't just to showcase the county's services, but it's also about connecting with the community. The series aims to "educate, engage, and empower" by providing a detailed look at how the county functions, what resources are available to citizens and highlight programs that help make the county thrive.

IOWA

The Together! Healthy Linn

See NEWS FROM page 11

From NEWS FROM page 10

collaborative has unveiled the 2025-2027 **LINN COUNTY Community Health Improvement Plan**, outlining strategic priorities to enhance the health and well-being of county residents over the next three years.

The plan identifies three primary focus areas:

- **Healthcare Access:** Improving insurance coverage, affordability, and navigation for underserved populations.
- **Chronic Illness Prevention & Management:** Promoting screenings, physical activity, and culturally relevant chronic disease education.
- **Supporting Mental Health:** Reducing stigma, expanding peer-led interventions, and increasing community-based support.



NEW YORK

As you make your way around **TOMPKINS COUNTY**, there's a new resource to get you from point A to point B as easily as possible. The county is launching the "Tompkins Transportation Scout," which is focused on consolidating all **transportation resources** into one place, WBNG-TV reported. The app can help you find a ride and offers options for medical appointments and carpooling.

The app connects you with your neighbors or coworkers who are going to similar places, allowing you to limit your carbon footprint.

"A lot of people, especially in this county, are concerned about climate change, and I think this is a good way of measuring the impact of pub-

lic transportation on those issues," Brooktondale resident, Ron Van Ormer, told the TV station.

NORTH CAROLINA

Months after Hurricane Helene tore through parts of **BUNCOMBE COUNTY**, the county's Community Engagement team has **launched a market** aimed at helping residents regain access to basic necessities, WBIR-TV reported.

"We know that their local grocery store was taken offline during that time, so we started a new market out there to help support those community members," said Leonard Jones, a community engagement specialist with the county.

OHIO

The **KNOX COUNTY** Convention and Visitors Bureau is excited to promote Knox County's green spaces with its Wilderness & Well-being Guide in recognition of May being **Mental Health Awareness Month**.

This initiative encourages community members and visitors to explore the abundant green spaces and outdoor amenities Knox County offers



to support their mental and emotional well-being.

The digital guide, available for free download on the Visit Knox Ohio website (www.visitknoxohio.com), highlights local parks, trails, waterways and scenic spots perfect for unwinding and reconnecting with nature.



Treatment Court Coordinator Andrea White introduces the Schuylkill County Wellness & Veterans Court May 1 inside the Schuylkill County Courthouse. Photo by Matthew Perschall, Republican Herald

PENNSYLVANIA

- **SCHUYLKILL COUNTY** Court of Common Pleas judges and other officials recently announced the launch of a new **Wellness Court**, a program for people with mental health diagnoses and veterans facing criminal changes.

Debra Todd, chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, joined the delegation in a packed courtroom at the county courthouse for a presentation of the county's latest treatment court. The Wellness Court is a diversionary program addressing mental health and substance use challenges affecting people involved in the criminal court system.

PENNSYLVANIA

- **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** has developed a new online tool to support municipalities as they prepare to meet the growing demand for **electric vehicles** in the county, North-PennNow Community News reported. The county planning commission recently unveiled its "Fully Charged!" online EV mapping tool to help communities build EV charging stations strategically and safely. Montgomery County has more EV registrations than any other county in Pennsylvania, while EV registrations across the Commonwealth have tripled since 2021.

"It's clear that our residents are moving toward electric

vehicles, which improve air quality for all of us and create cleaner, quieter streets," said Neil K. Makhija, chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners. "This is a great example of the role we play as a county, and how we can support municipalities and others who are trying to advance sustainability through EV charging infrastructure. With the Fully Charged! Tool, we've put it all in one place to make it as easy as possible."

On April 17, the Board of Commissioners voted to install 18 new EV charging stations at five county-owned facilities, enabling a quicker transition to an all-EV county vehicle fleet.

VIRGINIA

ALBERMARLE COUNTY is asking for community input on the newly launched **Three Notched Trail Shared Use Path Master Plan**, Cville Right NOW reported. The 24-mile trail will connect Charlottesville to the Blue Ridge Tunnel, providing area residents with safer and healthier transportation and recreation options. Over the next two years, the county and its planning partners will identify potential routes, prioritize segments and build a shared community vision for the trail's future.

Send your news and photos to Mary Ann Barton at mbarton@naco.org.



NEBRASKA

DOUGLAS COUNTY is launching a new **emergency notification system**, "Alert Douglas," and officials urged residents to sign up ahead of its official launch earlier this month, WSB Radio reported.

The new system replaces the county's previous service.

Alert Douglas is designed to provide real-time alerts and critical updates on potential dangers, including severe weather, public safety threats and other emergencies. Residents can choose to receive notifications via phone call, text message or email.

Douglas County Emergen-

cy Management Agency Director James Queen says the new platform offers a more user-friendly experience and better customization options for residents.

"Alert Douglas' is an important communication tool for our community," Queen said. "In an emergency, fast,

reliable, and accurate information is critical. This new system has a more user-friendly interface and provides more customization options. We are encouraging citizens to sign up immediately so they can remain connected, informed, and prepared in the event of an emergency."

NACo 90TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXPO

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2025**

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