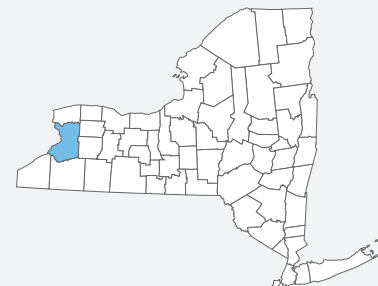


# Peer Navigators

Erie County peer navigators are individuals that have been in active recovery for at least two years and have undergone free training provided by the county on medication-assisted treatment (MAT).



Erie County relies on peer navigators—individuals with lived experience of addiction and/or criminal justice involvement—to facilitate connections to treatment in various parts of the county's opiate response. Born out of the county's finding that individuals with opioid use disorders are more likely to meaningfully interact and engage with peers than police, the county health department employs and trains peer navigators to assist with a number of opiate-related programs and initiatives. To qualify as a peer navigator, individuals must be in active recovery for at least two years and undergo free training provided by Erie County where they learn how medication-assisted treatment (MAT) works and how to recommend the best treatment based on a client's need. Peer navigators are also trained in motivational interviewing, which helps them better engage individuals to assist them with finding the best course of action. To help build the individuals' support system, peer navigators also support loved ones of individuals participating in treatment programs by training them on how to administer naloxone and providing information on treatment services in the community.

For Erie County's Buffalo MATTERS program and Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program (ODMAP) referral initiative, peer navigators visit the homes of individuals who overdosed to offer support and set up appointments at a community-based treatment provider 24 hours after a police officer sends a report through ODMAP or after a Buffalo MATTERS referral is submitted (for more information on Buffalo MATTERS, see Erie County, N.Y.: *Rapid Access to Treatment*). Erie County also uses peer navigators in its Opioid Probation Unit, where navigators provide check-ins and support to probation clients as well as support for probation officers in understanding what a person with an opioid use disorder is going through.

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This series of briefs highlights innovations happening in Erie County, New York, the site of a recent peer exchange for the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) grantees. Erie County was selected as the site of this peer exchange due to its comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing the opioid crisis.

The misuse of opiates became a growing public health and justice issue in Erie County, in the 2010s. In 2016, the county of 925,000 people experienced 301 opiate overdose deaths. Opiate painkillers were the number one prescribed drug in the county in 2012, topping 80,000 prescriptions. This, along with the closing of two major substance abuse treatment clinics in Erie County in 2013, led County Executive Mark Polancarz to declare a public health crisis and task county and other local leadership with finding solutions to save lives. Since 2016, **the county has invested over \$1.7 billion** of county, state, federal and grant funding in developing an array of interventions **to curb the number of opiate-related deaths and connect county residents to treatment.**