**Fiscal Facts: Opioid Deaths Drop as initial Settlement Funds Are Distributed**

State and local governments in Wisconsin have begun to spend funds they have received from the state’s opioid settlements, which have totaled $208 million so far and will total roughly $780 million by 2038.

Recent data show overdose deaths in Wisconsin have begun to decrease for the first time in decades, a promising sign as the state now looks to expand programming to prevent and treat opioid usage. It may be possible to build on this trend through state and local spending financed through legal settlements with pharmaceutical manufacturers, retailers, and distributors – the majority of which is required to go toward abatement of the opioid epidemic.

Passed in the summer of 2021, Wisconsin Act 57 determined how the state and local governments that had signed onto the litigation could receive and spend their settlement dollars. Three in every ten dollars will go to the state health department, while the remaining 70% will go to local governments.

So far, the state has devoted the largest share (27.5%) of its funds to capital projects at or for treatment facilities. Arbor Place in Menomonie and Meta House in Milwaukee each received $4.91 million to add a combined 80 treatment beds and services for women, while two more projects in Milwaukee County and northeastern Wisconsin were funded in the last year.

Wisconsin’s 11 federally recognized tribal governments have received a total of $12 million to use on prevention, treatment, recovery, harm reduction, and more in their communities.

Nearly $7.5 million has gone to the Narcan Direct Program, which in 2022 alone, supplied 135 law enforcement agencies with 31,560 doses of Narcan, the brand name of naloxone, which can immediately reverse an opioid overdose. The state also provided counties and tribal governments around the state with $7.8 million to cover room and board costs for Medicaid members in residential opioid treatment.

From the 70% share of the split, most is distributed to localities based on a formula applied to all settlement fund dollars that its population and how it has been impacted by the opioid epidemic. Milwaukee County will receive the largest share at about $102 million over the next two decades.

Milwaukee County used a comprehensive application process and a panel of expert reviewers to approve $16.5 million for an initial cohort of 15 projects. The largest was a $4.8 million effort to provide prevention, treatment, and harm reduction grants to community-based organizations that target historically underserved, marginalized, or adversely affected groups in Milwaukee. Other projects focused on harm reduction, project coordination, delivery of services to vulnerable populations such as the elderly or homeless, or new staffing or materials for various county agencies.

Moving forward, policymakers may wish to seek out stories of success in the use of opioid settlement funds, as state and local agencies tailor their approach to the opioid epidemic to best meet the needs of their residents.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*