

Committee Report

To:	Warden Matrosovs and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	July 10, 2025
Subject / Report No:	PSR-CW-04-25
Title:	Supportive Outreach Services Expansion Funding Opportunity
Prepared by:	Kevin McNab, Director of Paramedic Services
Reviewed by:	Randy Scherzer, CAO
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All

Recommendation

1. That Report PSR-CW-04-25 regarding the Supportive Outreach Services Expansion Funding Opportunity be received; and
2. That the Warden and Clerk be authorized to sign the funding agreement when received, to the satisfaction of the CAO and Director of Paramedic Services; and
3. That action be taken prior to Council approval, as per Section 26.6 b of the Procedural By-law.

Executive Summary

The Supportive Outreach Service (SOS) program continues to be a cornerstone in Grey County's response to the opioid crisis, offering trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and evidence-based care to individuals who face barriers accessing traditional health services. By meeting people where they are both physically and emotionally SOS builds trust slowly and respectfully, helping community members take steps toward recovery. The program currently supports around 100 individuals at any given time in our community operating 4 days per week Monday through Thursday.

In November, County staff applied for targeted funding made available to municipalities and Indigenous communities to support rapid responses to the overdose crisis. In February 2025, Grey County was informed that its application was successful; however, everything was put on hold due to the Federal election. This funding, which runs through March 31, 2027, will fully support the expansion of SOS to 7 days per week and includes the purchase of a dedicated outreach vehicle. This vehicle will enhance the program's ability to reach individuals in remote or underserved areas, improving access to care and strengthening the County's capacity to respond to urgent community needs.

Early data from January 1 to May 31, 2025, shows a promising trend: 26 opioid-related poisoning reports and 1 alert were issued, compared to 67 reports and 10 alerts during the same period in 2024. While it is too early to draw direct conclusions, this improvement reflects

the collective efforts of a strong network of partners including Brightshores Health System, United Way, Grey Bruce Public Health, CMHA, Grey County Paramedic Services, Grey County Housing and Social Services, OSHARE, Addiction Physicians, the Grey Bruce Ontario Health Team, Family Health Teams, Community Health Centre, Salvation Army, local municipalities, Fire and Police Services, Ontario Health at Home, Safe'n Sound, and others. Together, these partnerships are helping to build a safer, healthier community for all.

Background and Discussion

In response to the opioid crisis and the alarming increase in opioid-related poisonings and deaths, particularly attributed to substances like fentanyl, the Supportive Outreach Services (SOS) program was established in 2021. This community driven initiative aims to reduce the number of overdoses and opioid-related deaths and is dedicated to providing comprehensive and compassionate care to vulnerable populations. With the simultaneous rise in homelessness in Grey County, SOS delivers wrap-around care to those who are homeless, precariously housed, and disconnected from health and social services, addressing the urgent needs of individuals struggling with addiction and substance use.

The SOS program focuses on individuals with mental health and addiction issues, offering a range of life-saving interventions such as overdose reversal, mental health support, addiction services, drug checking, distribution of naloxone and other harm reduction items. By reaching out to individuals in their own environments and adopting a harm reduction and holistic approach, SOS strives to not only save lives but also alleviate the burden on emergency services.

Through its holistic care model, the SOS program empowers individuals toward recovery, helping to create safer and healthier communities for everyone. A truly healthy community is one where all community members are supported and taken care of. Many people with addiction and mental health concerns don't feel comfortable using traditional health services because of stigma or a lack of trust. That's why outreach is so important. By meeting people where they are and offering support in a kind and respectful way, SOS works to slowly build trust, reduce stigma, and help community members feel safe asking for help. This makes it easier for community members to take steps toward better health and well-being.

In November 2024, County staff applied for targeted government funding offered to municipalities and Indigenous communities to support rapid responses to the overdose crisis. This funding is intended to address urgent and immediate needs as defined by the communities themselves to strengthen local capacity and provide access to culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, and evidence-based programs and services.

In February 2025, the County of Grey was informed that its application for this funding was successful; however, everything was put on hold due to the calling of the Federal election this past Spring. The proposed enhancement is intended to be 100% funded through this program, which runs until March 31, 2027. Based on the current allocation, staff are projecting to be able to fully fund this program for 15.5 months, but staff are working on potentially securing additional funding to allow the program to run from September/October, 2025 to March 31, 2027. If additional funding is not received, staff will delay the launch of the program enhancements or end the program enhancements early.

This project aims to enhance the impact of the Supportive Outreach Services (SOS) program by expanding the coverage area, increasing staffing to operate seven days a week, introducing peer support services, and integrating an Indigenous navigator role to extend its reach and support to the diverse needs of the community. This expansion will allow SOS to provide more comprehensive care to vulnerable populations, including those affected by mental health issues, addiction, homelessness, and disconnection from essential services.

One of the project deliverables of the funding is to purchase and outfit a vehicle that will serve as a mobile unit for delivering services such as assessments, mobile drug checking, distribution of harm reduction items, and crisis counseling. This vehicle will better enable SOS to reach individuals in their own environments, ensuring timely access to critical services and support.

We're encouraged to share a positive trend in opioid-related poisonings in the unregulated supply across the Grey Bruce region. From January 1 to May 31, 2025, there were 26 reports and 1 alert issued compared to 67 reports and 10 alerts during the same period in 2024. While we cannot confirm a direct link to any one initiative, this shift reflects the significant and ongoing work happening across our community.

Through strong partnerships including Brightshores Health System, United Way, Grey Bruce Public Health, CMHA, Grey County Paramedic Services, Grey County Housing, Grey County Social Services, OSHARE, Addiction Physicians, the Grey Bruce Ontario Health Team (OHT), Family Health Teams and Community Health Centre, Salvation Army, local municipalities, Fire and Police Services, Ontario Health at Home, Safe'n Sound, and others we are working together to address the overdose crisis from all angles.

One key advancement is the introduction of Sublocade, a long-acting treatment now being offered through the SOS program. This treatment is helping our most vulnerable community members by preventing overdose and death. At any given time, SOS supports 20–30 individuals on this treatment.

It's important to note that this data reflects only the first five months of 2025, and with the majority of poisonings linked to fentanyl, the situation can change quickly. However, this is a hopeful sign that our collective efforts grounded in compassion, outreach, and evidence-based care are making a difference.

Financial and Resource Implications

The total funding allocation is \$1,126,700 which represents \$310,000 of up-front capital costs (including the purchase and outfit of a dedicated vehicle), and \$816,700 for operating costs. Staff project that the funding allocation will allow for the program to operate for approximately 15.5 months. All unbudgeted operating costs will be funded by the unbudgeted grant and therefore will not have a financial impact on the County's budget.

Relevant Consultation

☐ External:

☒ Internal: CAO, Finance

Appendices and Attachments

None