

Transforming Reentry – How Peer-Led Learning Communities are Rewriting Overdose Prevention and Recovery

The RITA Hub at UK CPH
cph.uky.edu/rita

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Disclaimer

Content included in this presentation reflects scholarly research and professional expertise of the RITA Hub/Peer Reentry Workgroup. It does not represent the views of the University of Kentucky.

What is the RITA Hub?

The RITA Hub provides no-cost training and technical assistance support to state and local government, criminal legal system, health, social service, and non-profit agencies across Kentucky in implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) to prevent and treat opioid use disorder (OUD).

This support includes advising agencies seeking to appropriately utilize locally awarded opioid abatement funds and/or applying for state opioid abatement funding.



Mapping the Challenges with Reentry

What Does the Research Say About the Reentry Process and Overdose Prevention?

- Overdose is the leading cause of death for people recently released from incarceration.
 - In the two weeks following release, formerly incarcerated individuals are 120 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose.
 - It is estimated that substance use disorder (SUD) affects 65% and opioid use disorder (OUD) affects 25% of people who are incarcerated.
- For people seeking to recover from SUD, multiple attempts are often necessary. On average, 5 serious recovery attempts are made before success.
- For people detained who have not yet been sentenced, there is uncertainty around release timing due to unpredictable scheduling of hearings that set bail/bond and sentences/release dates.
- Re-entering citizens are often without health insurance, identification, transportation, housing, and/or employment, while jail staff and contracted providers have limited bandwidth to develop individualized community-based treatment plans across public safety and public health contexts.

Why is it Important to Consider the Criminal Legal System (CLS)?

How many people are in Kentucky's criminal legal system?

103,000 Kentucky residents are behind bars or under community supervision.



PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

Details may not add to total due to rounding.

Sources and data notes: See www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2023.html

- In 2022, Kentucky was within the top 5 states for highest rate of OUD (more than 2.5% OUD cases per capita)
- Past estimates for the costs of the opioid crisis in the U.S. range from \$1.02 trillion in 2017 to \$1.5 trillion in 2020
 - A recent study estimated the total financial impact of OUD in 2024 to be \$4 trillion.
- **Criminal Legal System Costs = \$52 billion**
- Average Annual Total Cost per OUD case = approximately \$695k

Kentucky Burden:

- Total State Cost = \$95,471,977,174
- Cost per Case = \$709,441
- State/Local Government portion (includes CLS) = \$2,086,744,658
- >0.6% of State GDP

- Avalere Health (2025). The cost of addiction: Opioid use disorder in the United States. https://advisory.avalerehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Avalere-Health-White-Paper_The-cost-of-opioid-addiction_OUD-in-the-United-States.pdf
- Prison Policy Initiative. (2022). Kentucky State Profile. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/KY.html>

Statewide Jail Survey with KY Judicial Commission on Mental Health

- Goal: Assess the services and programs available in Kentucky jails
- Questions covered operations, capacity, staffing, programming, medical services, and reentry
- 58 jails submitted responses
- Overall: Jails lack sufficient staffing and resources to address need for care and treatment of MI/SMI, SUD, and OUD
- In open-ended questions inquiring about needs and obstacles, jailers repeatedly called for more resources to meet mental health needs

Screening Data

- All jails reported screening during intake for suicide risk, SUD, and OUD. 2 jails reported not screening for mental health.
- Of the jails that were able to provide data on the number of individuals that screened positive for the identified diagnoses:
 - MI/SMI annual averages ranged from 24.3 to 900 (by capacity) with the lower numbers as outliers
 - SUD annual averages ranged from 98.75 to 1175
 - OUD annual averages ranged from 132.5 to 1720
 - Data related to individuals receiving treatment is much more limited

Reentry Services

- 40 jails reported reentry services at their facility; 36 indicated services provided by a community partner (at least partially), 15 reported services provided by their medical provider
- 20 jails provided data on the number of individuals receiving reentry services; 10 of those had services being provided by a community partner
- 29 jails indicated access to a peer support or recovery coach; of those 20 partner with an off-site entity to provide those resources
- 37 provide transportation to medical treatment at release; 32 partner with a community organization to provide transport
- 15 jails report providing individuals with a written copy of their reentry plan at release
- “There are resources to help but the number that needs help keeps growing.”

REAL-WORLD REFLECTION (Rebecca):

How does this data resonate with what you have seen in practice?

Post-Incarceration Syndrome (PICS)

The Mental & Emotional Impact of Incarceration

Presented by Savvy Shabazz

What is PICS?

A set of psychological and emotional challenges experienced after incarceration that are similar to PTSD that impacts a person's ability to successfully reenter families and communities.

Lived Experience Insight:

“Coming home doesn't mean you're free mentally.”

After incarceration, I experienced hypervigilance, flashbacks, anxiety, difficulty trusting others, and challenges adjusting to everyday decision-making. Most responses were rooted in survival.

Post-Incarceration Syndrome (PICS)

Common Impacts:

- Always being on guard (hypervigilance)
- Anxiety, depression, and overthinking
- Isolation and difficulty building relationships
- Institutional thinking and fear of authority

What Helps:

- Peer support & safe spaces
- 1:1 Reentry Coaching
- Trauma-informed care
- Life skills & emotional intelligence
- Community, accountability, and purpose

Call to Action:

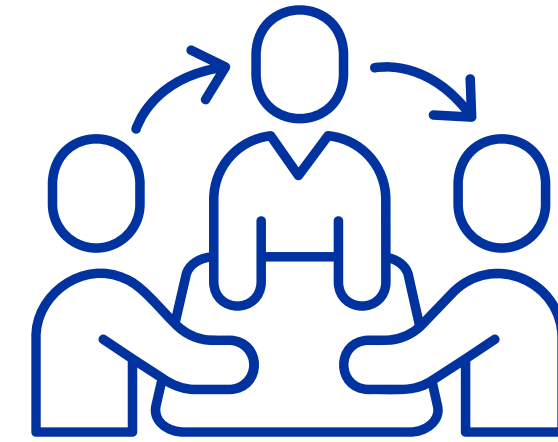
Recognize PICS. Address it. Support the whole person. Create opportunities
“Reentry isn’t just about coming home, it’s about learning how to live again.”

Sharing Solutions for Building Reentry and System Navigation Capacity Through Peer Support

Communities of Practice

The RITA Hub also facilitates three communities of practice, fostering meaningful connections between those in similar roles and/or facing similar challenges.

1. Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) in Jails Community of Practice
2. KY Community of Practice for Peers in Carceral and Reentry Settings
3. Navigators of the Commonwealth



Navigators of the Commonwealth

A monthly virtual learning collaborative for those in system navigator roles providing an opportunity to share resources and learn from peers in a supportive, community-driven environment.

Register to attend at bit.ly/NOCZoom

REAL-WORLD REFLECTION (Brittany):
Why does the Pathways team participate in NoC?



Life Coach-Each One Teach One Reentry Fellowship

Transforming Lives Through Reentry, Recovery & Civic Engagement
Founded by Savvy Shabazz

Who We Are:

A community-based reentry organization providing education, resources, and direct support to justice-impacted individuals locally, across Kentucky, and beyond.

Our Impact (Local → Statewide → National):

- Locally (Louisville): Life skills trainings “Bridging the Gap”, jail-based voting campaign, reentry workshops, and community partnerships connecting individuals to jobs and recovery support
- Statewide (Kentucky): Advocacy, voter education & restoration, and organizing in cities like Paducah, Mayfield Lexington, and Frankfort, advocating for justice reform
- Nationally: Speaking, workshop facilitation, and collaboration with justice reform organizations to expand awareness of reentry, recovery, and second chances

Life Coach-Each One Teach One Reentry Fellowship

What We Do:

- Life Skills Curriculum & 1:1 Reentry Coaching
- Recovery & Peer Support Services
- Civic Engagement & Voting Rights Education
- Workshops, trainings, and community events

Why It Matters: We address the full person, not just reentry barriers, but mental, emotional, and civic restoration, helping individuals successfully reintegrate and contribute to their communities and families.

Lived Experience Perspective: “This work is personal. It’s about turning lived experience into leadership, opportunities and creating pathways for others to succeed.”

Call to Action: Support, partner, and invest in solutions that break cycles of incarceration and build stronger communities.

KY Community of Practice for Peers in Carceral and Reentry Settings

A monthly virtual gathering of peer support specialists working at the intersection of behavioral health/recovery services and criminal-legal settings in Kentucky to network and advocate for systems transformation and stigma reduction.

Register to attend at bit.ly/kypeergroup





Holding through the hard parts

Brittany Herrington

The tattooed hand is a friend of mine and she's holding the hand of a call center worker where I work. I took this picture because the most basic of needs in reentry is support. We can't make any huge life changes alone. We need support. We need someone who cares about us enough, they are willing to hold a tattooed, track marked hand and not judge as we begin reentry. The hard part for Peers in this work, is it can't just be us and unfortunately it often times is. We have to be the support and try to integrate them back into natural supports. Sometimes it's practicing tough conversations with loved ones. Sometimes it taking them to 12 step meetings and introducing them to locals. Sometimes it's a call center line.



Healing a limb at a time

Brittany Herrington

We're just one limb on a family tree. We can get better and bring health back to the trunk and roots, but sometimes the family we come from is still unhealthy. Addiction, poverty, mental illness, and criminal thinking can be passed down, and when they are, it makes getting out of the system a lot harder.



Hope at No Cost

Rebecca Gray

This is a photo of me and Lt. Brian Hamilton along with staff from the HEALing Communities Study. It displays a vending machine that makes Narcan available for free to anyone who is present in the lobby of the Knox Detention Center. This machine became one of my many projects during my time at the jail. I took inventory often and contacted the health department when it needed to be replenished. I was given a key to access the vending machine so that I could straighten the boxes and add back what had been selected from the machine and left in the chairs unopened in the lobby after a busy visiting day. This depicts what it looks like when the local community collaborates with outside agencies and the lifesaving tools it places in the community.



Good Ol' Boys

Rebecca Gray

This picture was taken about a mile from my house. It is a sign that is being used to warn drivers about a bridge or road closure that is happening. I found the verbiage on the sign to be extremely poignant. ROAD CLOSED, LOCAL TRAFFIC ONLY! This reminded me that not all roads to re-entry are traveled equally. The “good ol’ boys” system is still alive and well in my area and this can make it near impossible for anyone who isn’t “someone” to navigate re-entry. Two people might have the same sentence but because one of them has a relative that went to school with or lives next to the judge or someone they know goes fishing with the specialty court worker they are afforded opportunities to “get it right” that the other person who does not know anyone might not be.



Welcome Home

Savvy Shabazz

This photo was generated through AI based on issues people are faced with upon release from prison. This is also based on my lived experiences. I generated this picture because it defines realistic trauma that we are faced with the second we are released. This photo relates to the topic because of the realistic issues that we are faced with upon release.



“Journey”

Savvy Shabazz

This is a photo of myself in 2005-2006 not having a clue about what I wanted to do with my life other than get a job. I found Savvy getting in the way of Savvy. It relates to the topic because I often found myself being the reason my progress was slow or at a standstill. I had an internal battle with myself. This picture is a reminder how far I have come mentally.

Call to Action to Promote Peer Supports in Reentry

Opioid Abatement Funding

Kentucky Settlement Overview

~\$1Billion in settlement
funds from:

- Manufacturers
- Distributors
- Pharmacies

50%
STATE

50%
LOCAL

Funds must be used
according to the National
Opioid Settlement
Agreement's [Exhibit E](#)
and Kentucky Revised
Statute [15.291\(5\)](#) for
OPIOID REMEDIATION.

Allowable Uses of Opioid Settlement Funds

Core Strategies

- **Naloxone** or other opioid overdose reversal drugs
- **Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)**
- Services for **pregnant women and parents**
- Expanding treatment for **neonatal abstinence syndrome**
- Expansion of **warm hand-off programs** and recovery services
- Treatment for **incarcerated populations**
- **Prevention** programs
- Evidence-based **data collection** on the effectiveness of abatement strategies

See Exhibit E, the National Opioid Settlement Agreement

2026 State Funded Peer Interventions

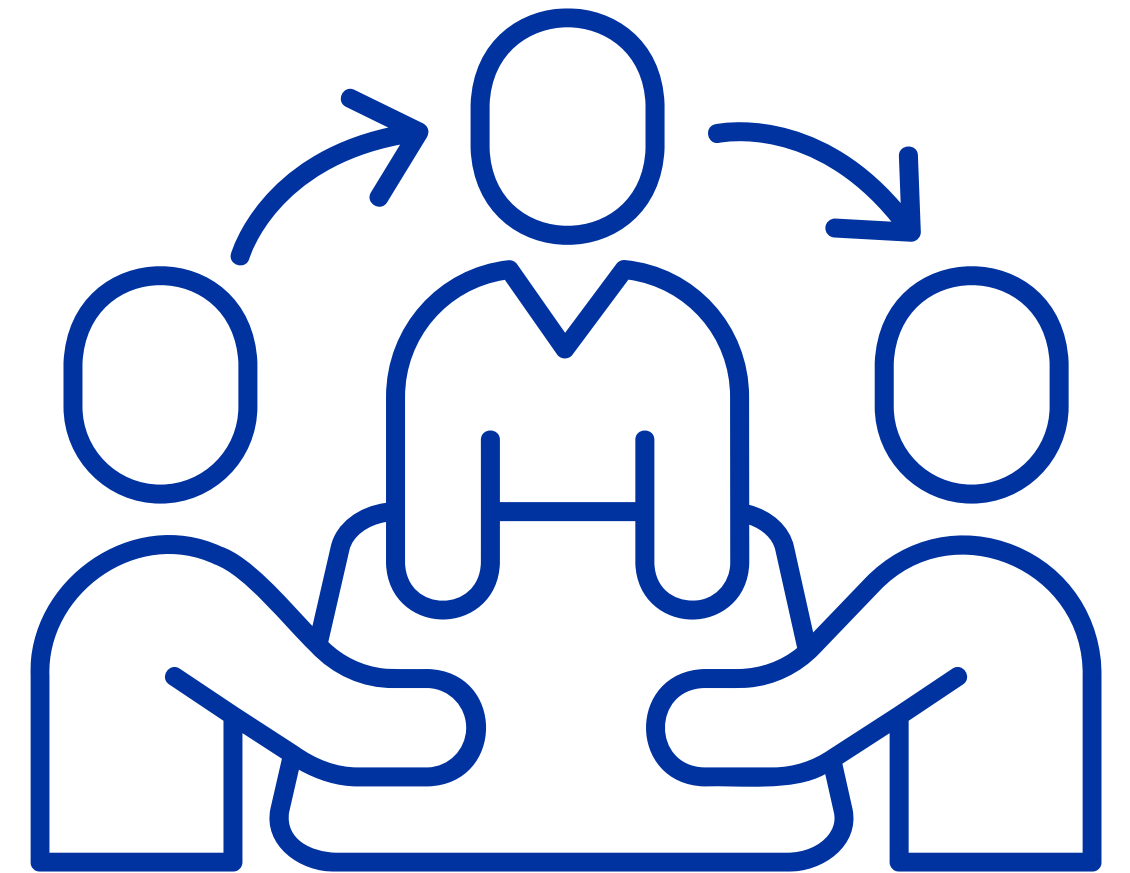
- Fivco Area Development District Boyd County **Recovery Community Center** Initiative
- 4th Dimension Appalachian Women's **Peer Recovery Navigation**, Transportation, & Alumni Support Initiative
- Grin Grant Inc. Comprehensive OUD Recovery Treatment Project: Dental Restoration, **PeerPath Detention Training**, and Continuing Education
- KY HRC **Training Institute for Peers** (TIP): Strengthening Kentucky's Peer Workforce to Support Treatment Engagement & Retention
- Kentucky River District Health Department The Hub's Women's Reentry Program: A **Peer-Led Jail-Based Treatment & Recovery Navigation Model**
- Oxford House Kentucky Expansion, **Reentry and Education Initiative**

<https://www.ag.ky.gov/Press%20Release%20Attachments/Grant%20Awards-%20ALL%201.pdf>

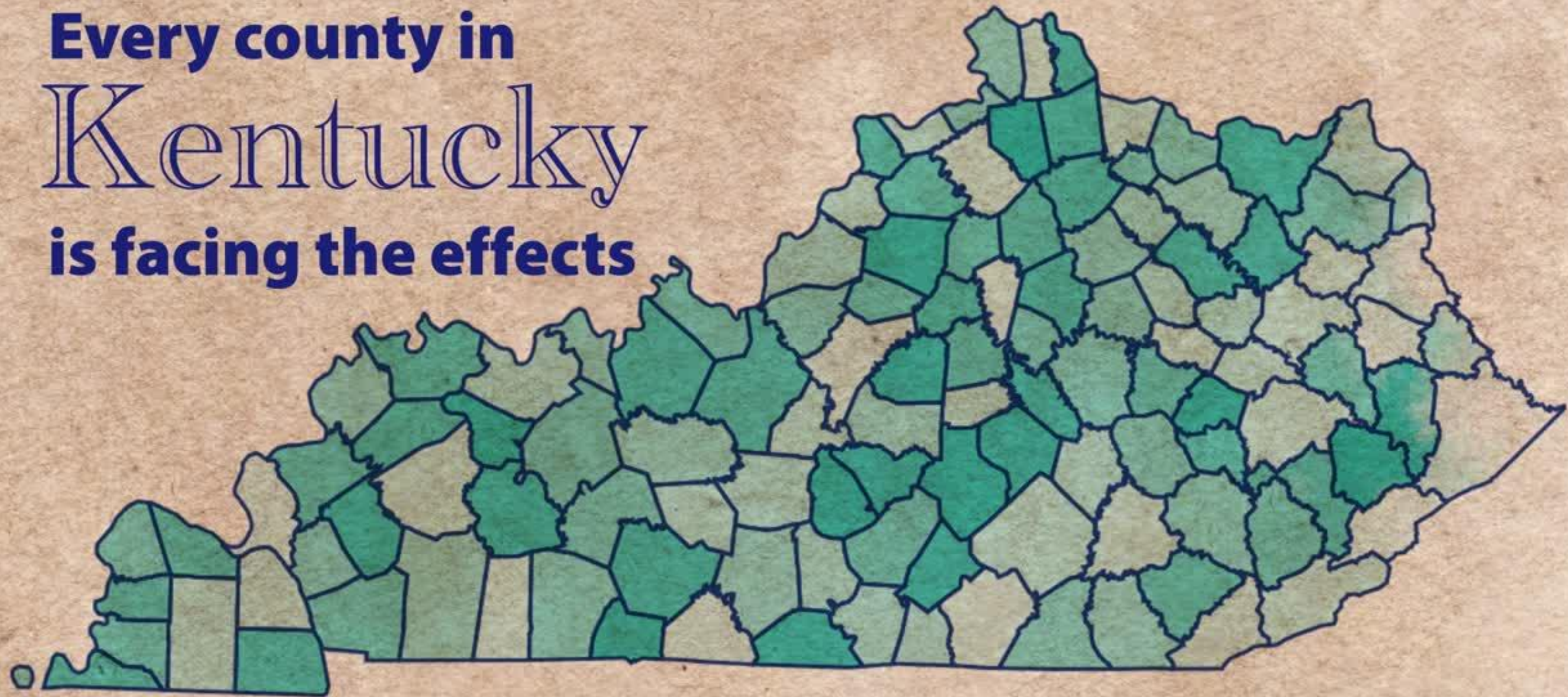
Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) in Jails Community of Practice

A monthly meeting of jail administrators, contracted medical providers, peer supports, and state agency leadership to address barriers to implementing MOUD in jails related to finances, policy, and education.

Contact brooke.hiltz@uky.edu for more information.



**Every county in
Kentucky
is facing the effects**



Opioid Overdose Crisis

Q&A

What is the RITA Hub?

Building upon extensive experience and knowledge gained during the [University of Kentucky's Healing Communities Study \(HEAL\)](#), the RITA Hub is built on the premise that each community and organization context is unique and that when we listen and work collaboratively together, we can transform lives and communities everywhere.



Our Services

- **Curating customized training programs** on OUD, lived experience advocacy, secondary trauma, and evidence-based practice (EBP) implementation.
- **Guiding strategic planning** and needs assessments to build community-driven EBP implementation plans and strengthen connections with peer networks and agencies.
- **Designing and conducting evaluations** of EBP processes and outcomes to drive continuous quality improvement and reporting.
- **Supporting jail implementation and expansion of MOUD** in alignment with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).



Our Services cont.

- **Embedding peer support specialists**, recovery coaches, and care navigators into agency workflows for stronger client engagement.
- **Creating reentry procedures** for county jails to streamline Medicaid reactivation, ID access, housing connections, and other supports during community reintegration.
- **Integrating overdose education and naloxone distribution** into agency practice, including installation of kiosks and peer-to-peer distribution models.



Resources at cph.uky.edu/rita

- [Medication for Opioid Use Disorder \(MOUD\) in Jails](#) Explainer Video
- [Request for Proposals](#) (RFP) Template
- [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) Template
- [Kentucky Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission](#) (KYOAAC)
- [Kentucky Association of Counties](#) (KACo)
- [Rapid Actionable Data for Opioid Response in Kentucky](#) (RADOR-KY)
- Statewide resources:
 - [FindNaloxoneNow](#)
 - [FindHelpNow](#)

Questions?



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Thank You!

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