

Substance Use Recovery Services Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

March 3, 2025, 9:00AM-11:00AM PST

Meeting Recording: [Substance Abuse Recovery Services Advisory Committee - YouTube](#)

HCA Executive & Administrative Support

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jason McGill, Executive Co-Sponsor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tony Walton, Section Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rachel Downs, Admin Assistant
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kelley Sandaker, SURSAC Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sarah Melfi-Klein, Unit Supervisor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alex Sheehan, BH Program Manager
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michelle Martinez, Project Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Brianna Peterson, Plan Writer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tim Candela, Health Services Consultant
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Blake Ellison, Meeting Facilitator	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hailee Fuller, Admin Assistant		

Committee Members (28)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tony Walton, SURSAC Chair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Amber Cope	<input type="checkbox"/>	Donnell Tanksley
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hunter McKim	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Brandie Flood	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Malika Lamont
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sen. Manka Dhingra	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stormy Howell	<input type="checkbox"/>	Addy Adwell
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sen. John Braun	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chad Enright	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kevin Ballard
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rep. Lauren Davis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	John Hayden		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rep. Dan Griffey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Niki Lewis		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Caleb Banta-Green	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sherri Candelario		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Don Julian Saucier	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	James Tillett		Alternates / Optional Attendees:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shawn Mire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Christine Lynch	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rep. Jamila Taylor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alexie Orr	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sarah Gillard	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rep. Gina Mosbrucker

Meeting Attachments

- Meeting Agenda

Substance Use Recovery Services Advisory Committee (SURSAC) Updates

Teesha Kirschbaum, Director of the HCA Division of Behavioral Health & Recovery, shared updates regarding the budget process:

- Governor Ferguson released his budget proposal that includes budget reductions to many of the programs that are focused on behavioral health, including a potential 50% reduction in the Recovery Navigator Program, and long-term civil commitments.
 - There should be a final and active budget near the end of the 2025 Legislative Session toward the beginning of May.
 - Budget Reduction Information - <https://ofm.wa.gov/budget/budget-reductions>
- As a cabinet agency, HCA's role is to reflect the governor's priorities. We've submitted possible budget scenarios as directed, but the final decisions rest with the governor's office and the Legislature, and the final budget is still several months away.
- The budget process is still in its early stages, and final decisions are months away.
- On March 18, 2025, an updated revenue forecast will be release, which will provide guidance on how much of a budget deficit Washington State is facing.

Questions and Comments from SURSAC Members

Q: Are there any updates related to the opiate and alcohol taxation funding report that Rep. Davis discussed at the February 2025 SURSAC meeting?

A: Rep Davis notes that any bill that increases state revenue is not subject to cut off and that revenue bills are usually discussed toward the end of session. Rep. Davis reported she will provide that bill number once it is introduced.

Q: When will we know how much the cuts are to the Recovery Navigator Program (RNP)?

A: The budget will not be released and known until close to the end of the Legislative Session. Last Day of Session, or sine die, is currently April 27th, 2025. Barring any need for a Special Session.

Q: How will proposed budget cuts affect the SURSAC Committee and programs that the Committee has supported?

A: We are not able to provide a clear answer to this question until the final budget is released toward the end of Legislative Session.

Q: Were these programs framed in a way that displays the importance of public safety that the Governor's Office was able to see and understand? Because this is a loss in infrastructure in communities that are not typically put into budget cuts.

A: The budget reductions were very difficult for the HCA to decide on as they have to decide where general fund state (GFS) dollars are currently being allocated and where some potential reductions are that could be made.

SURSAC Member Comment Period

- Representative Lauren Davis shared that individuals can reach out to her office and they can work toward coordinating a letter to the Governor's Office and to the budget writers for both the House and Senate. They currently do have HB 1427, that directs to the HCA to look at contracting with an entity to come up with low barrier cost effective mechanisms to potentially offload some of the cost. There is a lot of rigor involved in properly billing Medicaid and part of the goal of this subcontract would be to figure this out. As a result, it would reduce burden on agencies providing services and free up more funding.
- A SURSAC member shared that a letter is being formed, and Caroline Sanders, from Purpose.Dignity.Action, will be sending this out to individuals. All RNP-related staff will eventually receive a sign-on letter for this so to be sure to look at their email.
- A SURSAC member suggested that the SURSAC Committee could potentially draft their own letter of support. The SURSAC Chair will follow up with HCA legislative affairs and provide an answer to this via email.
- A SURSAC member shared that our federal government may be cutting Medicaid. This is important to remember as the federal government is looking at \$880 billion worth of cost savings from Medicaid.
- A SURSAC member shared "Give our programs a few years .tax the rich. just sayin'."
- A SURSAC member shared that Homeless Outreach Stabilization Transition (HOST) is also funded with 100% general fund state dollars, so asked why HCA did not propose cuts for other, similar programs. They also shared that RNP is both a housing and a public safety program, both of which the Governor directed to be preserved.

Public Comment

Q: The Governor said that all programs that were added in the last two years would be cut as well. What BH programs do you think will fall into that category?

A: Each state agency went through budget reduction scenarios to review recently implemented programs and the full list of those was sent to the Office of Financial Management (OFM). The Governor's Office uses this information to put forward the proposed budget. This can be viewed here: <https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/budget/statebudget/2025-27/govrecsum/25-27FergusonFeb25RecSums.pdf>

Q: An attendee asked for clarification as whether HCA was part of the decision-making process to propose to cut RNP funding by half or if it originated with the Governor's office?

A: The original proposed budget reduction scenarios originated at the HCA level.

Q: What data was looked at in supporting the decision to make a fifty percent reduction in funding?

A: It was a very difficult decision in deciding which programs would be put forth as potential cuts and this is only one step in the process as they do not have a final budget. We had to look at where GFS dollars were and how proposed budget reductions can be done based on that.

Q: Who can individuals contact and provide information to relative to the return on investment of such programs like RNP so it can be framed differently? Who can we contact for next steps?

A: Contacting one's local state legislative representative or senator is how you could go about providing this information.

- Contact information of state legislature officials can be found here:
<https://app.leg.wa.gov/districtfinder>

Q: Who can people contact at the HCA level regarding the benefits, return on investment, etc. of the Recovery Navigator Program.

A: They can reach out to Teesha Kirschbaum (Teesha.kirschbaum@hca.wa.gov) and MaryAnne Lindeblad (maryanne.lindeblad@hca.wa.gov).

Q: Will other Blake programs such as HOST see budget cuts as well?

A: We will not know for certain until there is a final budget released at the end of Legislative Session. All information related to proposed budget reductions can be found at:

<https://ofm.wa.gov/budget/budget-reductions>

- A meeting attendee shared that there may be a misunderstanding of different groups related to how RNP upholds public safety efforts that the Governor's Office is committed to holding.

Walk-on Item Requests

- No Walk-On Item Requests.

Recovery Navigator Program Q3 2024 Quarterly Reports

Brianna Peterson, Technical Plan Developer and Report Administrator, shared a presentation on the Recovery Navigator Program Q3 2024 Quarterly Reports. The presentation encompassed:

- Overview
- Updates
- Q3 2024 Referral and Outreach Data
- Law Enforcement Highlights
- Gender and Race Distribution for Referral and Outreach
- Q3 2024 Case Management
- SURSAC Feedback
- Questions/Contact Information

Questions and Comments from SURSAC Members RE: Recovery Navigator Program Q3 2024 Quarterly Reports

Q: How much direct care is SUD treatment, harm reduction....related? And direct care and referral services are duplicated (they can have more than 1)?

A: I can answer the first portion of that question, 100 percent of RNP King Co. Peer WA is harm reduction related.

Q: It feels disingenuous (or cognitive dissonance) occurring as the meeting started off sharing that there is an HCA-proposed budget cut of RNP by 50%, yet the data being shared shows a return on investment of the program and is in alignment with the Governor's priorities. Can there be more mindfulness towards that?

A: Tony Walton responded and thanked the member for their feedback and comments. He further noted that the Governor’s Budget Reduction proposals were released two business days prior to the SURSAC meeting, which didn’t leave ample time for additional planning. A decision was made to bring the information to the committee to support immediacy and transparency.

COMMENTS:

- A SURSAC Member shared an older example of how we documented care navigation activities which has been very helpful information for understanding more about what exactly occurred <https://adai.uw.edu/care-navigation-2022>
- A SURSAC Member shared that they are shocked at the proposed fifty percent reduction proposed to RNP funding and it may have something to do with having health efforts and public health efforts confused with public safety efforts.
 - A SURSAC member shared they watched the Governor’s Office press conference the week prior and there was not a clear definition on how public safety is defined so they may be some ambiguity around this definition that contributed as a factor in budget decisions.
- A SURSAC Member shared that they will discuss with University of Washington Government Relations team, but they are, too, in support of a letter and that framing it from the lens of how it supports public safety would be helpful language.

Questions and Comments from Meeting Attendees RE: Recovery Navigator Program Q3 2024 Quarterly Reports

Q: Could we have this presentation added to the chat for later review?

A: The presentation will be available on the SURSAC website [here](#).

COMMENTS:

- A meeting attendee shared that the Governor “has a very narrow definition of "public safety" that he is using as he considers the budget.”
- A meeting attendee shared that “66% of all individuals referred in our counties identified as homeless with/without housing, and 34% of all referrals are from our partners in public safety, from 22 law enforcement agencies and jails. In agreement with what Rep Davis already mentioned in the chat., in many ways, RNP is in alignment with the Governor's priorities.”
- A meeting attendee shared that she has RNP participants who would be more than willing to share their stories in spaces beyond SURSAC meetings and they can reach out to her if this is something they would like. She can be reached at: Kimmy@recoverynavigatorprogram.org
 - Other meeting attendees echoed this sentiment.
- A meeting attendee followed up with this and shared that they belief that support from law enforcement would also show the governor of the importance of RNP.

Research and Data Analysis Presentation on statewide arrest and charge data related to Simple Possession

Tasha Fox, Research Associate with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, shared a presentation on Research and Data Analysis Presentation on statewide arrest and charge data related to Simple Possession. The presentation encompassed:

- Unlawful Possession of a Controlled Substance – Charges By County
- Unlawful Possession of a Controlled Substance – Charges By Month
- Unlawful Possession of a Controlled Substance – Charges By Court
- Unlawful Possession of a Controlled Substance – Charges By Agency
- Unlawful Possession of a Controlled Substance – Charges By Accompanying Charges

Questions and Comments from SURSAC Members RE: Research and Data Analysis Presentation on statewide arrest and charge data related to Simple Possession

Q: Will this information be shared for later review?

A: Yes.

Q: The percentages in the categories are the percent of the total sample of possession charges across the state? So, when you indicate for Pierce County, 11%, that means that of all the total charges filed, Pierce County comprises 11% of those charges. Is that correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Do we have access to demographic/racial breakout data?

A: It is currently on DSHS' radar to look at but was not something that we were able to incorporate into the tables shown today. It is at the top of the list for next steps.

Q: Can we also get it broken out according to location? It would be interesting to see some places that have local ordinances against harm reduction activities.

A: Yes.

COMMENTS:

- A SURSAC Member shared it would be helpful to see a demographic break out.

Questions and Comments from Meeting Attendees RE: Research and Data Analysis Presentation on statewide arrest and charge data related to Simple Possession

Q: Are these filed charges or referred to charges?

A: Kevin Walker, from DSHS, confirmed they were charges filed.

Q: Is anything being done to see some historical data? Compared to prior years and felony charges prior to the Blake changes. It would be helpful to see if there is any variance. This type of data would be helpful for programs to get on a regular basis so we can shift our efforts to focus on agencies that are those "highest filers."

A: Some historical data had initially been looked at, but a much deeper look is something that can be done.

Q: Do these figures count charges under local ordinances?

A: Yes.

Q: Is there a way to have context with general population compared to these numbers? The numbers are great, but without knowing the size of these police departments and the populations they serve, it's really just a number with no context.

A: Adding some of these numbers would be helpful in interpreting these numbers and is something we can look into adding.

COMMENTS:

- A meeting attendee shared that from “March 29,2023 to February 28, 2025 the city of Kennewick referred 60% of possession of controlled substances cases to the RNP Pretrial Diversion program. RNP celebrated 8 Graduates from Pretrial Diversion last Friday.”
- A meeting attendee shared that showing whether these percentages are files charged or referred to for charging because it would show whether or not these numbers do or do not include diverted cases.

Final Comments

- **Kelley Sandaker**, SURSAC Administrator, shared a list of all links provided during the chat today that can be found here:
 - [OFM Budget Reduction](#)
 - [Important Session Dates](#)
 - [Washington State proposed Budget from the Gov Office.](#)
 - [To find your representatives](#)
 - carolanne.sanders@wearepda.org
 - [HB 1427](#)
 - [Public Safety Video from the Gov. Ferguson](#)
 - [HCA Budget Savings Options 2025](#)
 - [Homeless Outreach Stabilization & Transition \(HOST\) Program](#)
 - [SURSAC Website](#)
 - [Care Navigation at Harm Reduction Programs: Community-Based “Meds First” Buprenorphine Program Preliminary Data](#)
 - kimmy@recoverynavigatorprogram.org
 - [Drug trends across Washington: Crime lab data](#)
 - [New and emerging drugs in state crime lab evidence: Quarter 2 & 3 2024](#)
 - [HB 1574](#)
- April 7th from 11AM-1PM, HMA will be hosting a Safer Supply info session. More info to come! Here at Cherry Plaza after SURSAC.

Next Steps

1. Kelley will send out the next SURSAC agenda prior to the April 2025 meeting.