Behavioral health services have become a health topic of increasingly urgent national concern. Drug and alcohol abuse is a complex issue that requires attention to consumption, the consequences of abuse and the numerous contributing factors that lead to misuse and abuse.

In Arkansas, about 124,000 individuals aged 12 or older were dependent on or abused alcohol, and 70,000 individuals were dependent on or abused illicit drugs, each year between 2009 and 2013. In 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimated that 22.5 million Americans, aged 12 and older, needed treatment for alcohol or illicit drug use; 11.8 million adults needed mental health treatment or counseling.

Substance use and mental health disorders often share common risk factors including adverse childhood experiences, trauma, parental substance use and mental health disorders, and extreme poverty. Recent state and national health initiatives and prevention plans have acknowledged shared risk factors of substance use and mental health disorders and the need for coordinated health care services to address them.

SAMHSA recognized that coalitions, prevention specialists, researchers, health care professionals and community leaders needed an infrastructure for collecting data as well as making data-driven decisions to address substance use and mental health disorders. Substance use and mental health data had been collected at local and national levels, by numerous agencies using different data collection methods. Although individuals could access the widely varied data sources online or by specific data requests, the process was quite time consuming.

To remedy this, SAMHSA provided federal funding for all states, jurisdictions and several tribal entities to establish State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroups (SEOWs). SEOWs are networks of people and organizations with the analytical, substance use or behavioral health background to support each state’s prevention and treatment efforts. The workgroups provide a forum for policymakers, researchers and community leaders to have a data-driven exchange of ideas to effectively use prevention resources.

THE ARKANSAS SEOW

SAMHSA funded the Arkansas SEOW in 2005 through the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant and it continues to be funded through
the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant. The Arkansas Department of Human Services’ Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) contracted with the Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care’s (AFMC) Analytics Department to provide data analysis for data-driven decision making, to produce and disseminate data products, and to provide technical assistance and leadership for the SEOW. AFMC serves as the analytic and advisory agent in the workgroup.

The coalition includes diverse groups including epidemiologists, researchers, data analysts, prevention specialists, social workers, the Arkansas Department of Health, regional prevention providers, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, the Arkansas Department of Education, tobacco coalitions, schools and colleges.

Prevention is at the core of SEOW’s efforts because it is the most effective way to decrease the cost and adverse health outcomes caused by substance abuse and mental health disorders. Through the SEOW, AFMC supports DBHS in its decision-making process regarding the delivery of prevention services.

The mission of the Arkansas SEOW is to provide policy-relevant analysis to state and community leaders by assessing the health and societal factors that contribute to substance abuse. The primary goals of SEOW are to bring systematic, analytical thinking to the causes and consequences of the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and to promote data-driven decision-making methods. These goals facilitate effective and efficient utilization of prevention resources throughout the state.

SEOW STRUCTURE

Membership in the SEOW coalition includes managing, advisory and analytical members representing various state agencies, treatment facilities, prevention organizations, youth organizations and schools, businesses, research institutes and grass-roots organizations. Each group plays a role in both the decision-making process and the direction of the Arkansas SEOW through meetings, leadership discussions and subcommittees. The SEOW facilitates interagency communication and collaboration of data. Epidemiological profiles and other data products provide detailed assessment of priority areas, and prevention and treatment effectiveness efforts.

SEOW members work diligently to distribute the data resources created by the workgroup to their agencies and communities for prevention planning. In a recent example, a SEOW member’s community coalition re-focused their prevention efforts on suicide after reviewing their county profile’s statistics on the increasing suicide rates affecting their community. The community coalition set up a taskforce to address this issue and increased community awareness of suicide risk factors and ways to prevent it.

DATA PRODUCTS

SEOW produces a variety of products to enhance prevention efforts. The Arkansas Epidemiological State Profile of Substance Use is produced every other year and includes both state- and county-level data. The workgroup also produces fact sheets and informational tools on various substance use and mental health topics, including e-cigarettes, “bath salts,” underage drinking and suicide. The majority of fact sheets and informational tools are directed towards parents, providers and community members. However, recent SEOW efforts have included materials targeted to teen audiences to increase reach and awareness and provide tools for schools and youth groups that are focusing on substance use prevention. All data products are provided free upon request at the website.

A website was created as part of the SEOW infrastructure to increase access to collected data. Providers can access the www.preventionworksar.org website to download reports, tools and other community resources. The website is designed with individualized pages to provide the most pertinent material. Data tables, maps and local resources for substance abuse and treatment are easily accessible for every Arkansas county through the website.

Providers are encouraged to get involved in the SEOW by accessing the www.preventionworksar.org website. Each county in Arkansas is served by a regional prevention resource center and those representatives are also listed as a county resource. Anyone interested in the SEOW workgroup meetings or who needs a specific data resource or informational tool can use the “Contact Us” tab on the website.

Dr. Bondurant is the supervisor of program evaluation for the AFMC.

REFERENCES:
2. SAMHSA, 2015 http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention