

Surry County Community Perspectives on Substance Use and Family Impact

November 2025

Substance use remains one of the most pressing and complex challenges facing Surry County, deeply affecting individuals, families, and the broader community. The "Surry County Community Perspectives on Substance Use and Community Impact" report, published by the Surry County Office of Substance Abuse Recovery (SCOSAR) as part of the Surry Strategic Framework 2030, provides a comprehensive examination of local attitudes, experiences, and needs related to substance use.

Drawing on extensive community interviews and survey data, the report highlights both the high level of awareness and the profound concern among residents regarding the prevalence and impact of substance use. Community members consistently report that substance use is a visible, pervasive problem, with consequences that extend far beyond the individual to touch families, schools, workplaces, and the justice system.

The report reveals that while Surry County benefits from strong community engagement and a foundation of awareness, significant barriers remain. Stigma, gaps in resources, and uneven levels of understanding hinder effective prevention and recovery efforts. The findings underscore the interconnectedness of substance use with mental health, trauma, poverty, and generational cycles, emphasizing the need for a holistic, multi-layered response. Community voices call for expanded education, early intervention, accessible treatment, and a shift from punitive to rehabilitative approaches within the justice system.

The report concludes that only through coordinated, compassionate, and practical action—engaging all sectors of the community—can Surry County hope to reduce the impact of substance use and foster resilience and recovery for its families and residents.

Number of Individuals Interviewed = 96

Substance Use Problem Overview		
Prevalence and Impact	Report Findings	Unique Challenges (Rural Area)
Most pressing and complex challenge	Extensive community interviews (96 conducted)	Limited employment opportunities
Visible, persuasive problem	Interview data used	Pervasive isolation
Impacts families, schools, justice system, workplaces	Published in November 2025	Ripple effects on the family structure
Linked to mental health, trauma, poverty, generational cycles		

Key Themes and Findings		
Community Awareness and Perception	Substance Sources and Causes	Prevalence by Age Group
High Level of recognition among residents	Local Origin: Methamphetamine, Marijuana	Youth (12-17): Vaping (Nicotine/THC, Marijuana, Alcohol, Prescription misuse)
Gaps exist (minority less informed)	External Trafficking: Heroin, Fentanyl, High-grade Marijuana	Adults (18+): Methamphetamine, Fentanyl, Alcohol, Prescription pills
Stigma/misconceptions persist	Other Sources: Prescription drug diversion	Ease of access is critical factor
	Contributing Factors: Trauma, poverty, lack of opportunity, mental health, peer pressure	
Motivations for Use	Harm Spectrum of Substances	
Escape stress, pain, or trauma	Most Dangerous: Heroin, Fentanyl, Cocaine, Opiate pain medications	
Cope with mental health issues		
Fit in with peers	Less Immediately Harmful: Alcohol, Marijuana	
Boredom, curiosity	All substances can be harmful, depends on use	

Barriers and Negative Impacts		
Significant Barriers	Impact of Individuals/Families	Justice System Perception
Stigma (prevents seeking help, perpetuates cycles)	Broken relationships, financial instability	Seen as overly punitive and ineffective (“revolving door”)
Gaps in resources (treatment, mental health)	Health decline, homelessness, incarceration, death	Needs shift from punitive to rehabilitative
Uneven levels of understanding	Generational trauma and emotional wounds	
Lack of transportation/housing		
Addiction as a Disease		
Broad agreement (alters brain chemistry, requires management)		
Some see it starting with choice, evolving into disease		

Strategies and Recommendations		
Top Priority	Key Strategies	Required Collaboration (All Sectors)
Comprehensive, early, and ongoing education Education foundation for prevention and stigma reduction	Early intervention and prevention	Healthcare providers
	Accessible, affordable, destigmatized treatment	Schools and educators
	Expanded mental health support	Law enforcement (needs trauma-informed approach)
	Harm reduction (e.g., Narcan distribution)	Faith communities
	More positive youth activities (after-school programs)	People with lived experience Local officials/policymakers
Systems Changes Needed	Family Support	
More drug courts	Compassion, education	
Mandated treatment/integration of recovery programs	Open communication, empathy	
Shift in law enforcement approach (prevention/referrals)	Reducing stigma (critical for help-seeking)	