

Bridging the Gaps



Advocating for Children's Behavioral Health Programs through Opioid Settlement Funds in Southeast Pennsylvania

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COMMUNITY PARTNER



Children First is a child advocacy organization that works to improve the lives of our region's children by developing initiatives and advocating for quality health care, childcare, public education, and family stability.

<https://www.childrenfirstpa.org>

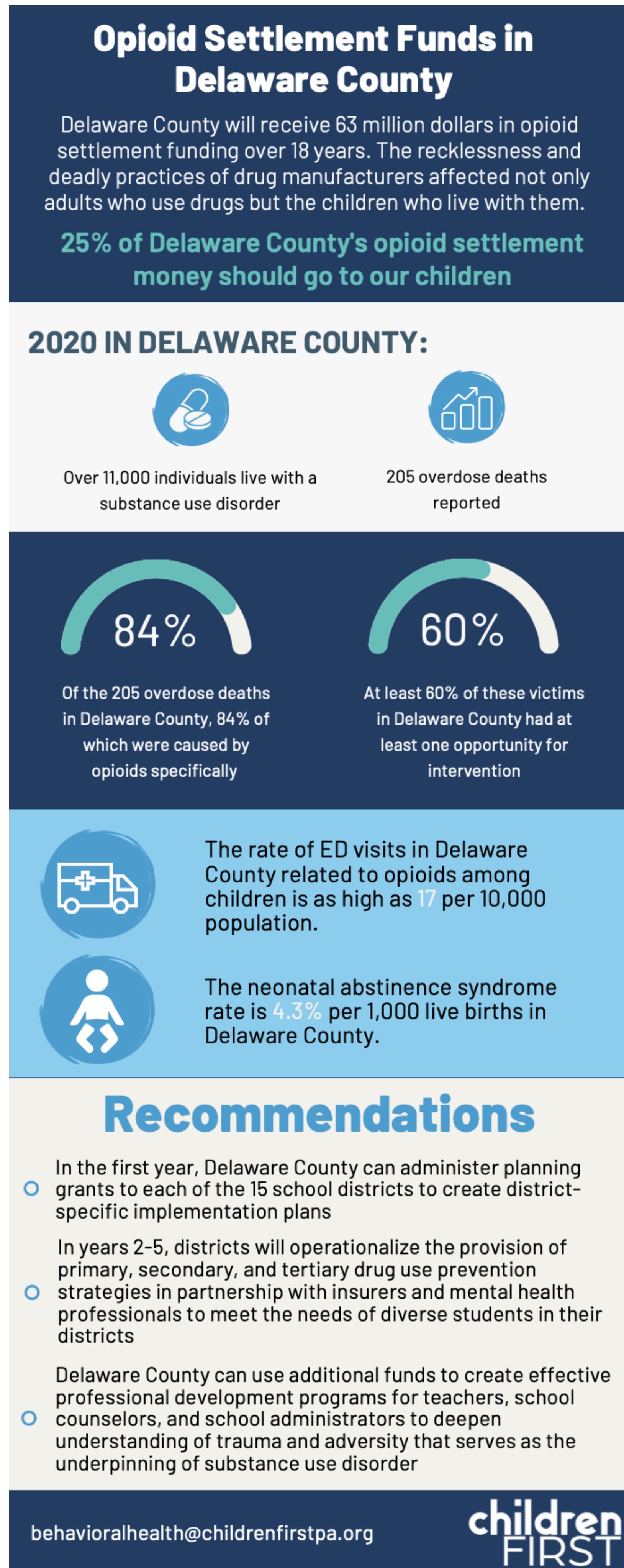
BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

- School-based behavioral health programs are a necessity for children
- Early identification and treatment will lead to better outcomes for students' academic performances
- Half of all the lifetime cases of mental health begin at 14 years old
- Only around 20% of children access the behavioral care they need and only 70-80% of those children access them in schools.
- Children are six times more likely to complete treatment in school settings than in the community.
- Schools tend to be less stigmatizing, leading to more effective care.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

- Completed two projects that advocate for a part of the opioid settlement funds to go towards behavioral health funding for children in the Southeast Pennsylvania counties
- Researched the effects of opioid usage on kids and created infographics that detailed rates of emergency room visits, neonatal abstinence syndrome, overdose deaths, as well as recommendations on how the settlement funds should be spent to serve children in SEPA
- Completed a resource mapping project that compiled 61 school districts' behavioral supports and interventions using the MTSS framework to identify districts with standout programs that can be modeled after

ACCOMPLISHMENTS



- Created infographics that will be used to advocate for funding for children's mental health programs from the opioid settlement funds that each county received
- Created an Excel spreadsheet that tracked 61 school districts' MTSS supports and interventions being offered at the elementary, middle, and high school levels
- Also includes the school district population, township politics, funding, expenditures per pupil, and number of counselors, psychologists, and social worker for each school district

REFLECTION

- Gave me a greater understanding of all the issues that children face in Pennsylvania as well as a greater appreciation of the tireless work of advocates fighting for change
- Became inspired by the passion that the staff at Children First share to develop policies that aim to better the community
- I would love to continue the work that I accomplished this summer, whether that looks like working on policy reform for mental health or tying in public health aspects with clinical dentistry
- I am thankful for the life-changing experience of working with and learning from the staff at Children First."