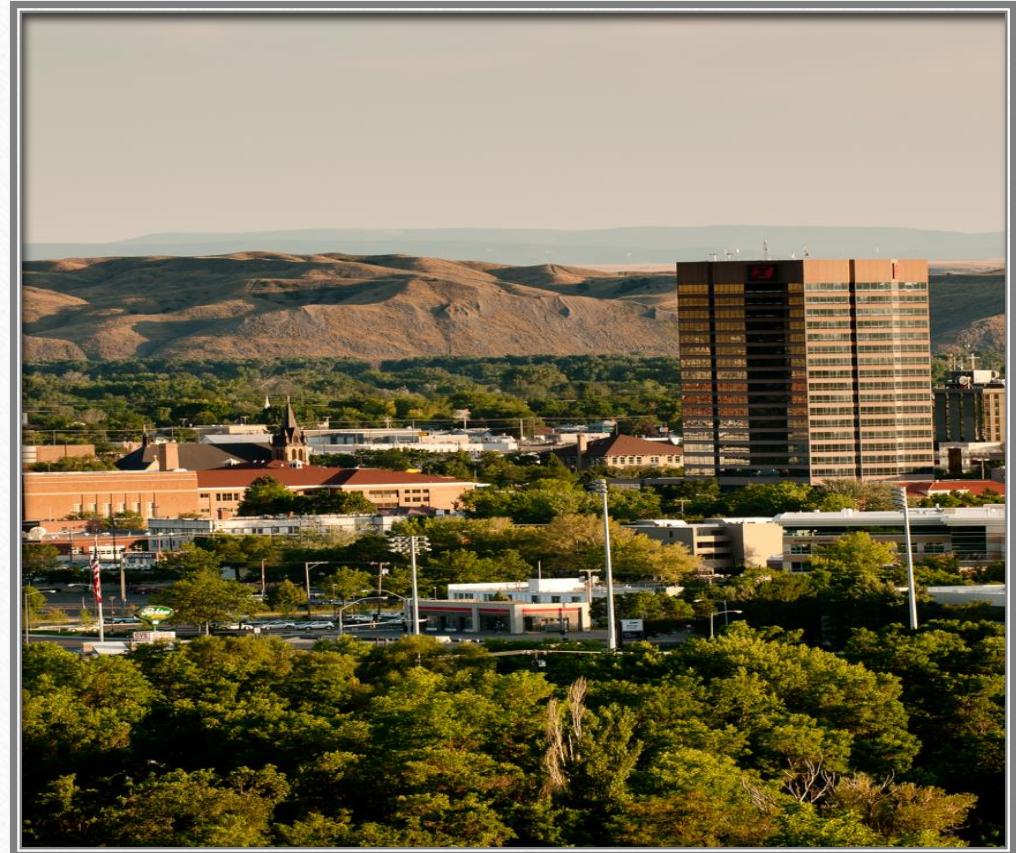


# Methamphetamine and Opioids in Billings and Montana

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# About Me

- Rob Hulsey
- Savannah, GA – Coastal Georgia
- Clemson University – Biological Sciences
- AmeriCorps VISTA 2019-2020:  
Community-Wide Opioid and  
Methamphetamine Response Initiative



# Community-Wide Opioid and Methamphetamine Response Initiative

- Billings Metro VISTA Project (BMVP) founded in 2009 by the City of Billings Community Development Division
- Sponsored by Corporation for National and Community Service
- Focus on **capacity-building** to alleviate poverty
- Second year of a three-year project
- **Objectives:** Assessment, Education, Prevention, and Intervention through:
  - Outreach
  - Materials Development
  - Community Advisory Group
  - Fund Development



# Characteristics of Opioids vs. Meth

## Opioids

- Narcotics class, containing illicit drugs (heroin) and prescription drugs (painkillers)
- Painkillers – legally prescribed in many medical settings
  - OxyContin (oxycodone)
  - Hysingla (hydrocodone)
  - Percocet, Vicodin, codeine, fentanyl, morphine, methadone, opium, etc.
- Depressant – drowsiness, lethargy, decreased breathing
- “Dope sickness” – severe withdrawal due to cessation. Days to weeks of anxiety, agitation, pain

## Methamphetamine

- Amphetamine class of drugs, many legal prescriptions for ADHD/insomnia (Adderall, Vyvanse, Ritalin, etc.)
- Stimulant – increased nervous system activity
  - Low - moderate strength/dose: decreased concentration/alertness, decreased appetite
  - High strength/dose (meth): powerful mood swings, paranoia, psychosis, aggression
- Withdrawal – extreme fatigue, sleepiness, and anxiety/depression lasting three to four weeks

# State of Substance Use - Montana

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- 10% of population has substance use disorder (SUD); 10% of those receive treatment
- Since 1980, drug offense rate ↑ 559% (especially meth)
  - Methamphetamine offenses ↑ 400% from 2010 – 2015
  - Heroin offenses ↑ 1557% from 2010 – 2015
- 31% of drug offenses were meth and 7% were narcotics
  - Meth has greatest impact on quality of life
- Opioids more associated with drug overdose deaths (42% in 2013 & 2014)
  - Opioids have greatest impact on lifespan

# State of Substance Abuse - Billings

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- Substance Abuse was ranked as the top issue in the community in the 2020 Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment
- 53.8% of residents surveyed said they, or someone they know, has been negatively affected by substance abuse (72.9% for low income)
- From 2016-2017, hospital emergency rooms saw 567 opioid-related emergencies
- In 2017, drug violations ↑ 15%, with similar increases in property and violent crimes

A scenic photograph of a waterfall in a forest. The waterfall flows down a dark, layered rock cliff. In the foreground, a fallen log lies across a rocky stream. The surrounding area is lush with green trees and shrubs.

# Supply and Demand of Opioids & Meth

# Supply of Opioids

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- 80% of world's heroin made in Afghanistan; majority of heroin in the United States comes from Mexico (Eastern US) and Colombia (Western US)
- Fentanyl (50-100x stronger than heroin) manufactured mainly in China and trafficked via dark web from Mexico → US or straight to US
- Prescription opioids such as oxycodone and hydrocodone have been produced legally in US pharmaceutical labs since 1990's
- CDC released guidelines for medical providers on prescribing opioids in 2016 – heavily combated by “Big Pharma”
- High incentives from drug companies for doctors to prescribe opioids (“free samples” and sometimes \$100,000+ for speaking/consulting)

# Supply of Methamphetamine

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- Household meth labs → industrial “superlabs”
  - Higher quantity and purity
- Most meth in Montana manufactured in Mexico (Sinaloa Cartel)
- Trafficked from southern border to Canada via interstate, through Montana
  - Now staying in Montana, especially Billings, due to high demand
- One pound of meth: Bought in CA for \$2K-\$3K, sold in Billings for \$11K-\$14K
- Increased violent crime – cartel presence and meth side effects

# Limiting Supply of Opioids & Meth

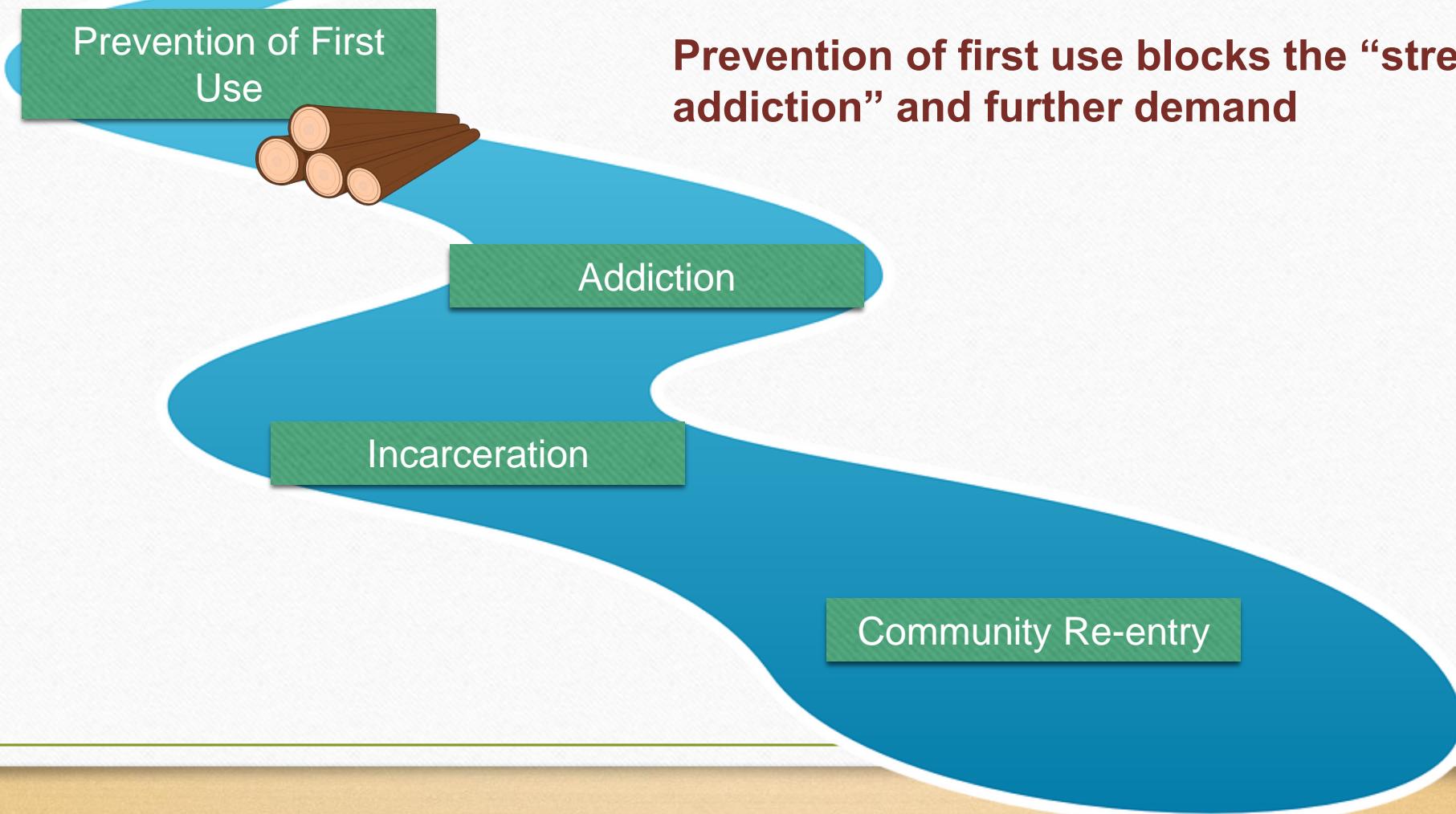
- Eastern Montana Drug HIDTA (High-Intensity Drug Traffic Area) Task Force
  - BPD, Sheriff's Office, DEA, US Marshals, FBI, ATF, ICE, USPS
  - Traffic stops, household raids
- Project Safe Neighborhoods in Billings (federal initiative)
  - Increased prosecution of gangs/cartels
  - Heightened reinforcement of all felonies, especially violent, firearm-related crimes
- US Customs and Border Patrol
  - Increased number of agents at borders
  - Strategy to Combat Opioids – More detailed inspection of cargo ships & international mail
- Increased monitoring of opioid prescribing

# Demand for Opioids & Meth

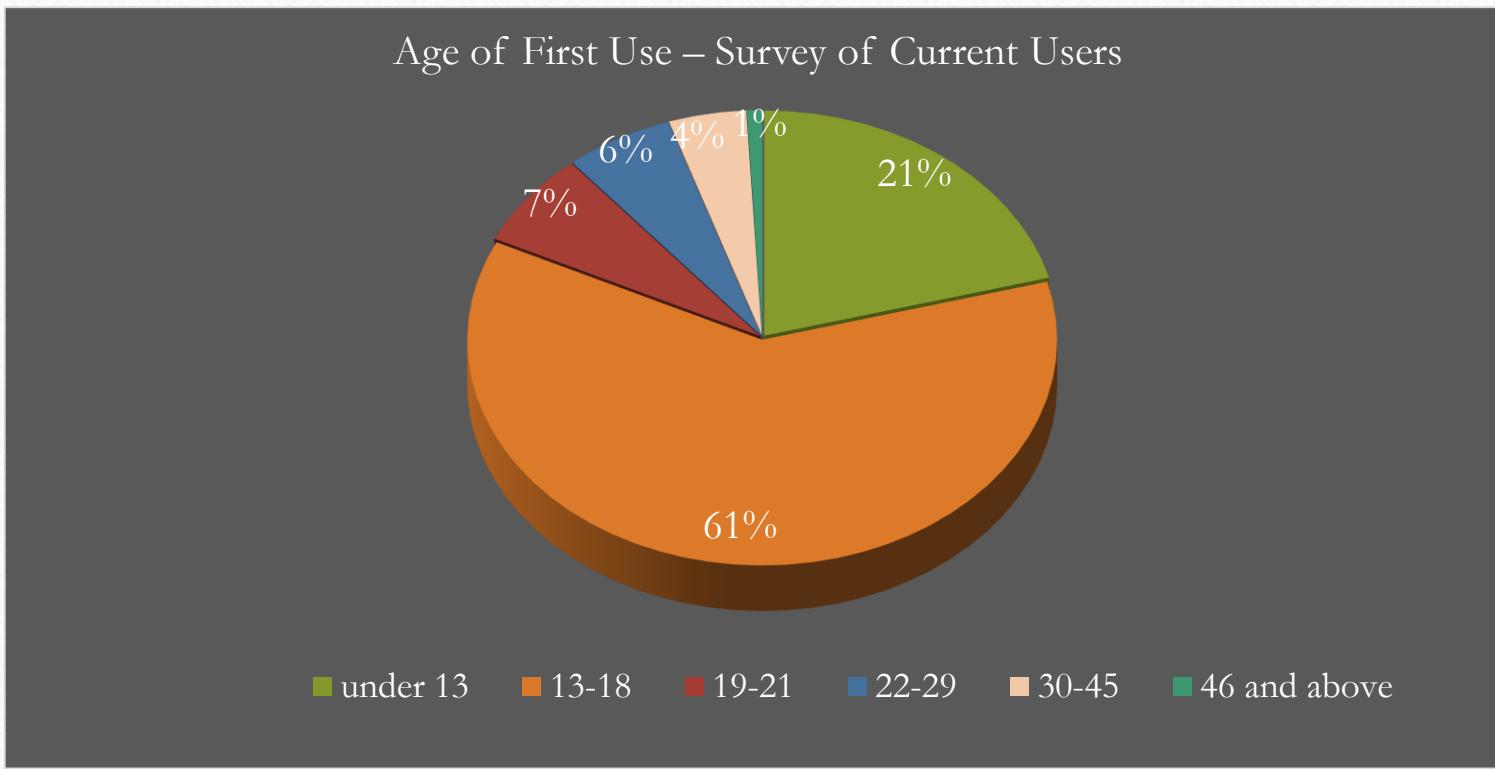
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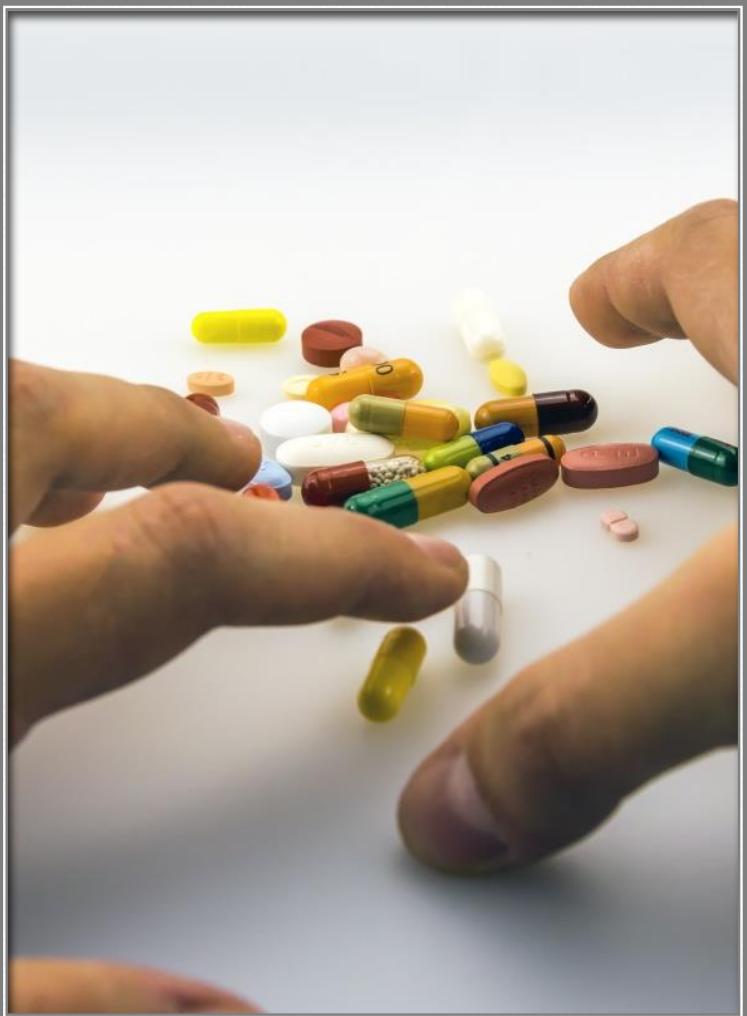
- Illicit and legal drug manufacturers continue to produce because of high profits and demand
- How else to combat?
  - Reduce demand – **prevention!**
  - Use alternatives to legal opioids (find new, safe painkillers)
  - Education on substance abuse
  - Increase access to treatment
- Nothing will be an immediate fix – **gradual society-wide process**

# Why Prevention?



# Age of First Use in Billings





# Factors of Prevention

- Target of prevention efforts is mainly youth
  - Universal: handle risk and protective factors of ALL kids in a large setting (schools, local communities)
  - Selective: focuses on at-risk youth
  - Indicated: targets already-using youth
- Risk factors for substance use addressed
  - Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
  - Use among parents or peers
  - Poor life skills for age
  - Low community attachment

# Ways You Can Help

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- If you are parent, be a consistent and positive role model for your children
  - ParentingMontana.org
- Advocate for prevention efforts and research
  - Work on prevention is being done at national level – SAMHSA
  - Vote for candidates that support tackling substance abuse, especially prevention
- Support local prevention-related organizations that serve Billings and all of Montana

# Conclusion

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- High rates of substance use disorder – need to target both the supply and demand sides
- Large size and reach of Billings' economy has made it an easy target for the drug trade
- Great steps are being taken to combat supply; more focus should be placed on **PREVENTION** in Montana to reduce the population's demand for substances

A wide-angle photograph of a rugged mountain range. The mountains are covered in patches of snow, particularly on the higher peaks and in the upper reaches of the valleys. The terrain is rocky and uneven, with some green vegetation visible in the lower, sunlit areas. A winding path or stream bed is visible in the valley floor. The sky is blue with some scattered white clouds.

Questions?

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