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Date: May 18, 2023

To: Lucia Schmit, Director of Snohomish County DEM

Dave Somers
County Executive

From: Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive

Subject: Opioid Epidemic

Background

On November 20, 2017, by Executive Directive issued under my authority, I directed the activation of the Snohomish County's emergency management system to coordinate the response to the opioid epidemic. The emergency management system established formal processes around the work of the Opioid Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC Group).

The MAC Group coalesced around seven shared goals and began to work on SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound) objectives. This work showed promise with the MAC Group achieving 159 of its 183 objectives, an 86 percent completion rate. The group's work included bringing Narcan training to all the county's law enforcement agencies, creating consistent messaging on the opioid crisis, and providing training to the staff at senior centers throughout the county.

The COVID-19 global pandemic forced us to refocus our efforts on protecting our residents from severe illness and death; meanwhile, the pandemic exacerbated the opioid epidemic, which continued to evolve. At the time I activated the emergency management system, Snohomish County was experiencing a disproportionate number of drug-related deaths compared to the rest of Washington; data we collected at that time attributed most of those deaths to heroin. Now the data tells us that fentanyl causes most drug-related deaths, and we see the emergence of other substances, such as xylazine, worsening an already terrible situation.

The growing prevalence of fentanyl and other substances means that we now experience an even greater number of drug-related deaths in Snohomish County and additional suffering by those afflicted with substance use disorder. The presence of these substances also contributes to increasingly intense community impacts that affect public safety, our environment, businesses, our education system, and the overall health of the county. Considering this, I reaffirm my commitment to using our emergency management system to address this crisis.

The emergency management system remains uniquely suited to coordinate our efforts. Federal emergency management doctrine, the National Incident Management System (NIMS), supports this when it describes its applicability as, "The scope of NIMS includes all incidents, regardless of size, complexity, or scope, and planned events (e.g., sporting events)." Further, the Revised Code of Washington and Snohomish County Code define emergency or disaster as an event or set of circumstances that "Demands immediate action to preserve public health, protect life, protect public property, or to provide relief to any stricken community overtaken by such circumstances." Finally, Snohomish County Code explicitly defines emergency management as "the preparation for and the carrying out of all emergency functions, other than functions for which military forces are primarily responsible, to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters."

Directive

I direct the continued activation of the Snohomish County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the Snohomish County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) to coordinate the County's response to the opioid epidemic. Snohomish County's Department of Emergency Management coordinates the County's response to emergencies and disasters via a plan (the CEMP) that assigns roles and responsibilities to agencies designated within its Emergency Support Function (ESF) annexes.

The previous directive specified the following ESFs:

- ESF #3 – Public Works and Engineering
- ESF #4 – Fire/EMS
- ESF #5 – Emergency Management
- ESF #6 – Mass Care, Housing, and Human Services
- ESF #7 – Logistics Management and Resource Support
- ESF #8 – Public Health and Medical Services
- ESF #13 – Public Safety and Security
- ESF #15 – External Affairs

The EOC represents the physical location where implementation of the CEMP occurs. Executive Departments under my authority shall provide by June 1, 2023, a list of staff members to the DEM Director, or their designee, who will act as these departments' ESF representative to the EOC during this activation. Two of the ESFs listed – ESF #4 and #13 – have coordinating agencies outside of my purview. I am requesting the support of the Snohomish County Fire Chiefs Association and the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office, respectively, to designate representatives for those ESFs as well.

Because this epidemic affects all of Snohomish County, I am formally inviting other jurisdictions and applicable agencies to participate in the MAC Group. So that I will have more direct involvement, I am also convening a Disaster Policy Group in support of this activation. The Disaster Policy Group's initial composition will include me and the heads of the various entities listed as ESF Coordinating Agencies.

Initial Policy Guidance

1. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, realign County efforts to address the opioid epidemic.
2. Within 30 days of receipt of this directive, provide a revised list of goals to the Disaster Policy Group for approval.
3. Based on the approved list of goals, prioritize immediate short-term objectives and strategies that reduce the number of drug-related deaths and mitigate the impacts to property and public safety in the county. These shall be briefed to the Disaster Policy Group within 90 days.
4. Based on the approved list of goals, develop and coordinate mid- to long-term objectives and strategies that reduce the number of individuals suffering from substance use disorder. These shall be briefed to the Disaster Policy Group within 180 days.
5. At the discretion of the DEM Director or their designee, meet as frequently as necessary to ensure close coordination among all goals and objectives. Document progress toward goals and objectives, participants, and policy guidance needed. Provide updates to the Disaster Policy Group, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis.
6. When appropriate, incorporate jurisdictions and agencies wanting to collaborate on this issue into the MAC Group.