

Investing Upstream: A Rural Blueprint for Decriminalizing Behavioral Health Crises

2025 Joint Public Health Conference
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➤ **Welcome & Session Objectives**

- Explore upstream investments in rural crisis response.
- Learn practical tools from 4 Missouri county health departments.
- Participate in a live Q&A panel with local grantees.



Why This Matters

The Challenge

Overview of the Diverting to Care (DTC) Initiative

- Launched by MFH in 2023 as an exploratory grant to explore the behavioral health landscape in rural Missouri.
- **Counties:** Douglas, Madison, Polk, Webster
- **Backbone Support:** MOPHI
- **Focus:** Shift from punishment to care; isolation to connection.



➤ The Upstream Approach

- What does investing upstream mean?
 - Address root causes early.
 - Build supports before crises escalate.
 - Shift from incarceration to community care.
 - Strengthen community and public health systems.



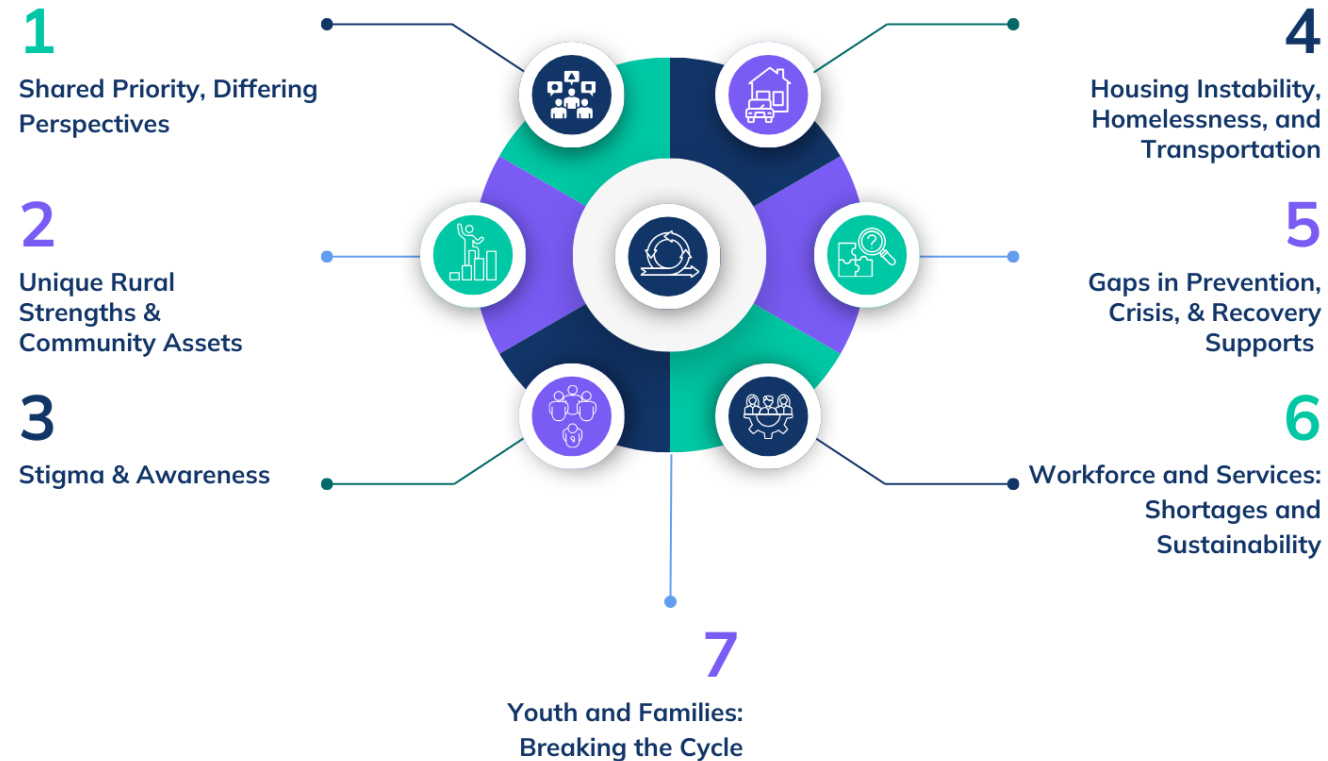
➤ Key Accomplishments

- Community-driven design: prioritized voices with lived experience.
- Strengthened cross-sector collaboration (law enforcement, public health, healthcare, community partners).
- Built data systems and paired quantitative indicators with qualitative insights.
- Developed sustainability foundations (funding mapping, embedding practices, stigma reduction).
- Participated in SIM workshops and learning exchanges.



➤ Understanding Community Needs

Thematic Analysis for DTC Focus Groups and Interviews



➤ Data & Systems

- County-specific data management systems
- Integrated law enforcement, courts, behavioral health, ED data
- Qualitative + quantitative approach -> contextualized findings
- Facilitated ongoing cross-sector conversations and trust-building
- Rural vs urban: rural relies on trust & collaboration; urban often has larger centralized systems



➤ Building Collaborative Capacity

- Cross-sector meetings created consistent forum for coordination.
- Developed shared language, roles, workflows.
- Relationships built and strengthen provide strong foundation for implementation.
- Rural advantage: collaboration is essential, not optional.
- Urban comparison: formal infrastructure can struggle with silos.



➤ Funding & Sustainability

- Mapped short-term & long-term funding streams (grants, state allocations, braided funding).
- Explored resource alignment across public health, law enforcement, courts, health organizations.
- Dual sustainability model:
 - Financial: diverse, stable funding sources
 - Practice: embed diversion principles into daily operations



➤ **Community Awareness & Stigma**

- This phase included community engagement to begin reducing stigma.
- Messaging emphasizes dignity, recovery, and resilience.
- Rural context: privacy concerns & “everyone knows everyone” dynamic.
- Early successes: community voices embedded in outreach and messaging.



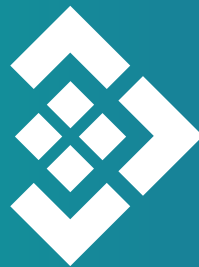
Panel Discussion

➤ Panel Participants

- Sonya Hodges, *Program Manager*
 - Douglas County Health Department
- Teresa Rehkop, *Administrator*
 - Madison County Health Department
- Carol Bookhout, *Health Education Supervisor*
 - Polk County Health Center
- Lora Smith, *Health Educator*
 - Webster County Health Unit



Thank You!



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