

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUD) RECOVERY IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

## Authors

Larissa Bello, Saket Bikmal, Hannah Cho, Julia Greenman, Amanda Ljuba, Hannah O'Malley, Neha Reddy, Emily Satterwhite, Jarrett Toothman, Callie Van Wart, Eugene Lacy Watson III, Ginny Wolfe

## INTRODUCTION

The Appalachian region experiences overdose rates at 43% higher than the national average (ARC, 2021). Given demonstrated gaps in recovery resources in the New River and Roanoke Valleys of Virginia, there remains a systemic need for addressing substance use disorder. Our location at Virginia Tech serves as a motivator for our research, as Southwest Virginia has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic and has been featured nationally via media such as [Dopesick](#).



## METHODOLOGY

- Examination of
  - the peer-reviewed literature on substance use disorder (SUD), with a focus on housing and recovery centers
  - recent state legislative action
- Advocacy trainings:
  - “You Write the Bill” workshop on the legislative process
  - Advocacy for health policy
  - REVIVE! opioid overdose response
- Field observations
- 27 interviews with 22 key informants

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Increased state funding for mental and behavioral health services
- Facilities for residential and outpatient treatment and recovery services
- Peer recovery specialists
- Pathways to treatment through law enforcement and criminal justice system
- Harm reduction, including needle exchange programs, naloxone distribution, and mobile units for localities that qualify (i.e. City of Radford, Pulaski County, and Giles County)
- Expansion of affordable broadband internet for access to telehealth
- Reduction of stigma around substance use disorder (SUD)

## CATAWBA HOSPITAL PROPOSAL

To address the critical need for more recovery facilities, including Housing First options that do not require sobriety and options for pregnant women, families, and those with co-morbidities, we propose a feasibility study to explore the revitalization and expansion of Catawba Hospital, a state-run psychiatric facility. Key features that make its campus a prime candidate for adding mental and behavioral health capacity include:

- Extensive existing state-owned infrastructure and land;
- Uniquely positioned to draw on expertise via Virginia Tech and Roanoke in order to serve 560,501 people in the New River Valley, Blue Ridge, and Piedmont community service board areas.
- Located in Jefferson National Forest near the Appalachian Trail, enabling access to the therapeutic benefits of nature;
- Its role as an important economic lifeline for rural Roanoke County.

## NEXT STEPS

We are pursuing both a legislative and local organization approach to initiating a feasibility study. Our next steps include:

- securing approval from the Blue Ridge, New River Valley, and Piedmont community service boards;
- exploring partnerships;
- seeking legislative patrons.

We hope that our research and conversations will be a springboard for recovery and positive change in the lives of those affected by substance use disorder.



VIRGINIA Rural Health Association



We are grateful for the support and expertise provided to us by our community partners, Bently Wood, NRVCS, and Beth O'Connor, VRHA, and also for the time and commitment of our key informants.