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## PUBLIC LIBRARIES RESPOND TO THE OPIOID CRISIS WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES

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# Case Study: Salt Lake County Library

Through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, OCLC and the Public Library Association have conducted research into how public libraries are supporting their communities through the opioid crisis, and how libraries are partnering with organizations to meet local needs. This profile was created through interviews with ten individuals: three staff members at the Salt Lake County Library, three staff members at partner organizations (R&R Partners and Utah Naloxone), a library board member, and three community members who received naloxone distributed at the library. Their thoughts and experiences may not be generalizable to all of the staff of the library or their partners.

*This is one of eight research-based case studies highlighting varying opioid response efforts across eight locations in the US. Additional information about the project can be found online at [oc.lc/opioid-crisis](https://oc.lc/opioid-crisis).*

## Community and Library Overview

Salt Lake County Library (SLCL) has a service population size of 878,380 and operates with 18 branch locations and one large event center. It has an operating budget of \$41,419,930 with 113 full-time equivalent librarians and 285.5 other staff, totaling 398.5 personnel. On average there are about 3.5 million visits per year.<sup>1</sup>

Salt Lake County, Utah, is comprised of mostly White populations (80%) and 18% are Hispanic or Latino. About one third (33.6%) of its citizens hold a bachelor's degree, and 90.2% have at least a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup>

The median household income is \$67,922, and one out of ten (10.4%) of its citizens is living in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Salt Lake County's unemployment rate is 2.7%,<sup>4</sup> and 12.1% of the population does not have health insurance.<sup>5</sup>

Salt Lake County Library branches are located in a county with a shortage of mental health care professionals.<sup>6</sup> Salt Lake County has an

opioid prescribing rate of 63.2,<sup>7</sup> which is the number of retail opioid prescriptions dispensed per 100 people. The number of general drug overdose deaths in Salt Lake County was 817 per 100,000 people during 2015 through 2017.<sup>8</sup>

In 2015, more than 2.6 million opioid prescriptions were dispensed in Utah; the equivalent of almost one prescription per Utahn.<sup>9</sup>



**18 BRANCH LOCATIONS AND ONE EVENT CENTER**



**SERVICE POPULATION, 878,380**



**UNINSURED RATE, 12%**



**OPIOID PRESCRIBING RATE, 63.2 (per 100 people)**



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“Most people who are going to the library are looking for something to improve their life. Maybe they want to teach their kid to read. Maybe they want to study to take a test. Maybe they need to escape from a domestic violence situation. The library can present resources to them in a way that is not abrasive. It’s accessible, and they trust the librarians to ask for it. Because of this I think the opioid work is such a perfect fit.”

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—Salt Lake County Library Manager

## Salt Lake County Library’s Opioid Response

Salt Lake County Library has conducted three key initiatives to respond to the opioid crisis, and all three include support by their local partners.

### NALOXONE AND OVERDOSE AWARENESS TRAINING

The first initiative is the availability of naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal drug, for use by library staff within the library. Each branch in the Salt Lake County system is stocked with naloxone kits for staff use, and all staff have had the opportunity to become trained in naloxone administration. In addition to standalone training, the library has also added naloxone training to the optional CPR training already provided to staff.

The training includes information on recognizing the signs of an opioid overdose, statistics on who is impacted by the opioid crisis, how to administer naloxone, and information on available substance abuse resources. Four trainings have been offered so far to library staff. All library staff are invited to attend the training, no matter their role.

### NALOXONE DISTRIBUTION TO THE PUBLIC

The second initiative is making naloxone available to the public, free of charge. This means any patron can walk into the library and request a free naloxone kit, no questions



Naloxone kit distributed by the library.  
Photo courtesy of Salt Lake County Library

asked. Up to two kits can be picked up per person, per visit. In order for a branch library to be eligible to distribute naloxone, at least one staff person from the branch must attend a naloxone training.

### PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The third response from the library is its participation in the advertising campaign: Use Only as Directed. As part of this, one branch of the library displays an art installation of 7,000 paper pill bottles hanging from the ceiling of the library foyer—a visual representation of the 7,000 opioid prescriptions that are filled in the state of Utah every day.

Other aspects of the campaign include wall posters, large graphics near the checkout desk, and window decals calling attention to the opioid crisis. One of the campaign messages

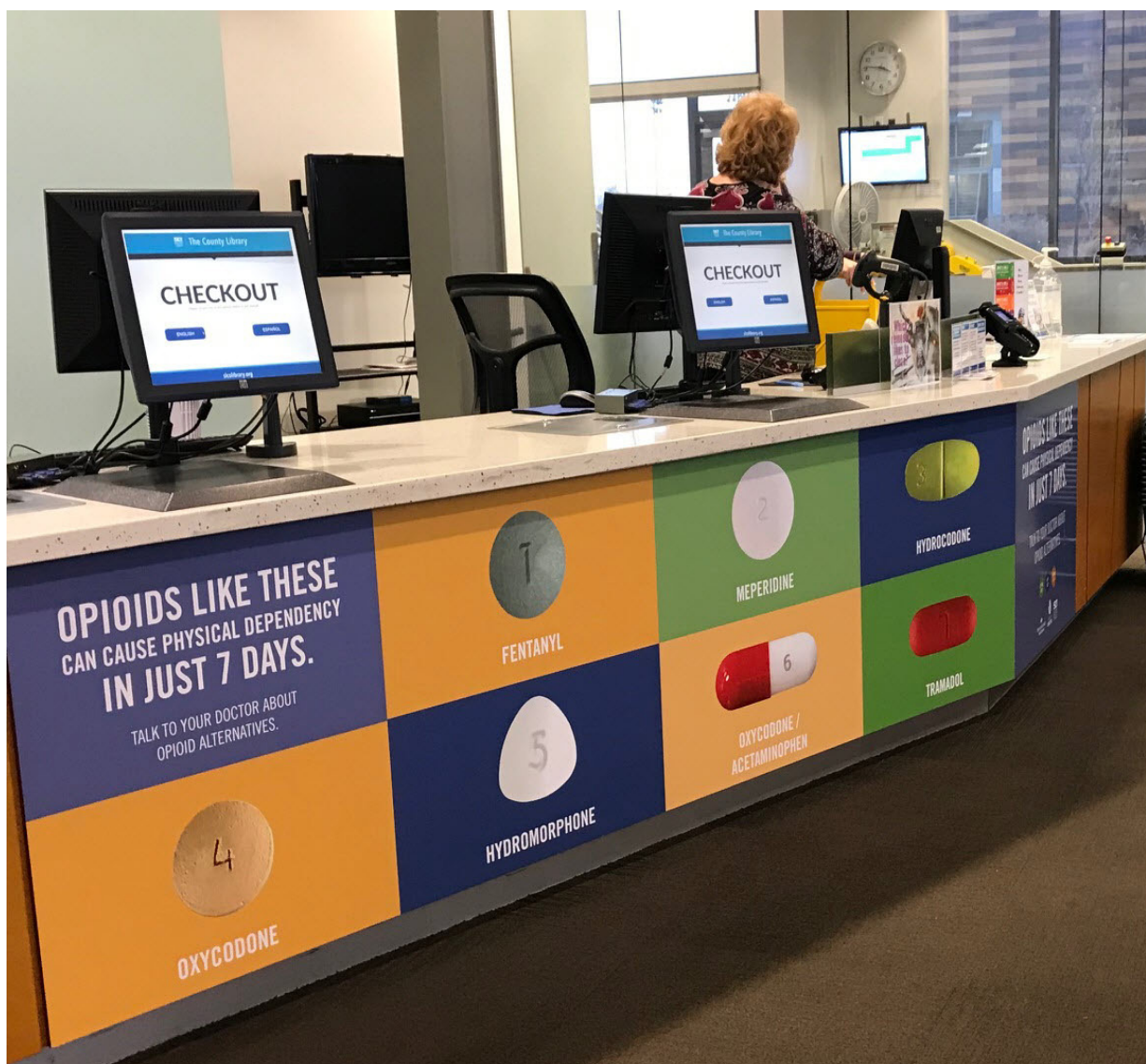
shares the fact that an individual may become physically dependent on opioids in as few as seven days. The campaign also encourages safe disposal of unused and unwanted prescriptions by sharing the statistic that 74% of Utahns currently addicted to opioids get them from a friend or family member. Drop boxes to safely dispose of these unused medications are available to the public through the campaign.

Similarly themed art installations and advertising are in use in other parts of the community, including hospitals, recreation centers, and community centers, and often include messaging tailored for the particular audience.

The overarching objectives for the Use Only as Directed campaign are to encourage people to speak to their health care providers about the inherent risks of opioids, discuss alternatives to opioids for pain management, and to learn about proper disposal of leftover opioids.

## Partnering for Success

To implement their opioid response activities, the Salt Lake County Library works closely with their sister government agency, the Salt Lake County Health Department. The health department provided the initial supply of naloxone and training to the library staff. The



Use Only As Directed, public awareness campaign at the checkout desk.  
*Photo courtesy of Salt Lake County Library*

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“That’s one of the advantages of being in a county system. You have these cross-cutting concerns and cross-cutting populations. Collaborating with all of those organizations on a number of different things helps us to understand better what the needs are within the community.”

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—Salt Lake County Library Director

library previously worked with the health department on other issues, and recognizes the advantage of cross-sector collaboration. The health department also initiated the Use Only as Directed public awareness campaign. The library worked directly with the lead ad agency, R&R Partners, on the messaging and placement of the campaign materials in the library.

As a result of the opioid response activities, SLCL developed a new relationship with the team at Utah Naloxone, a nonprofit based at the University of Utah Department of Pediatrics, which works closely with a local health provider, Intermountain Healthcare. This partnership provides the library with access to the free naloxone kits for the public, as well as with staff expertise from Utah Naloxone.

Many county agencies and partners have been very supportive of SLCL’s response to the opioid crisis, including both the previous and current mayors. The Salt Lake Valley Suicide Prevention Coalition has called the library “pioneers” in the field, and the Utah Opioid Task Force, which has members such as the attorney general, the Drug Enforcement Agency, senators, and the governor, are also supportive of the library’s opioid response activities. When asked to reflect on what makes all of these partnerships work so well, library and community partner staff shared their thoughts:

“It’s a very powerful thing to get all those different people and organizations coming in and advocating for a change in attitude and behavior surrounding opioids. And the library is where the rubber meets the road for reaching audiences. They’re a gathering center and in a great place to put out social

cause messaging that gets the dialogue going.” —Community Partner Director

“I think it’s trust, number one. There is a common goal and belief that we’re all in the business of delivering great services to our county residents. It’s because of that shared goal, as well as the trust that we have in each other’s abilities. There’s no need for us to be at odds with each other, so we have a very common set of objectives.” —Salt Lake County Library Director

## Funding

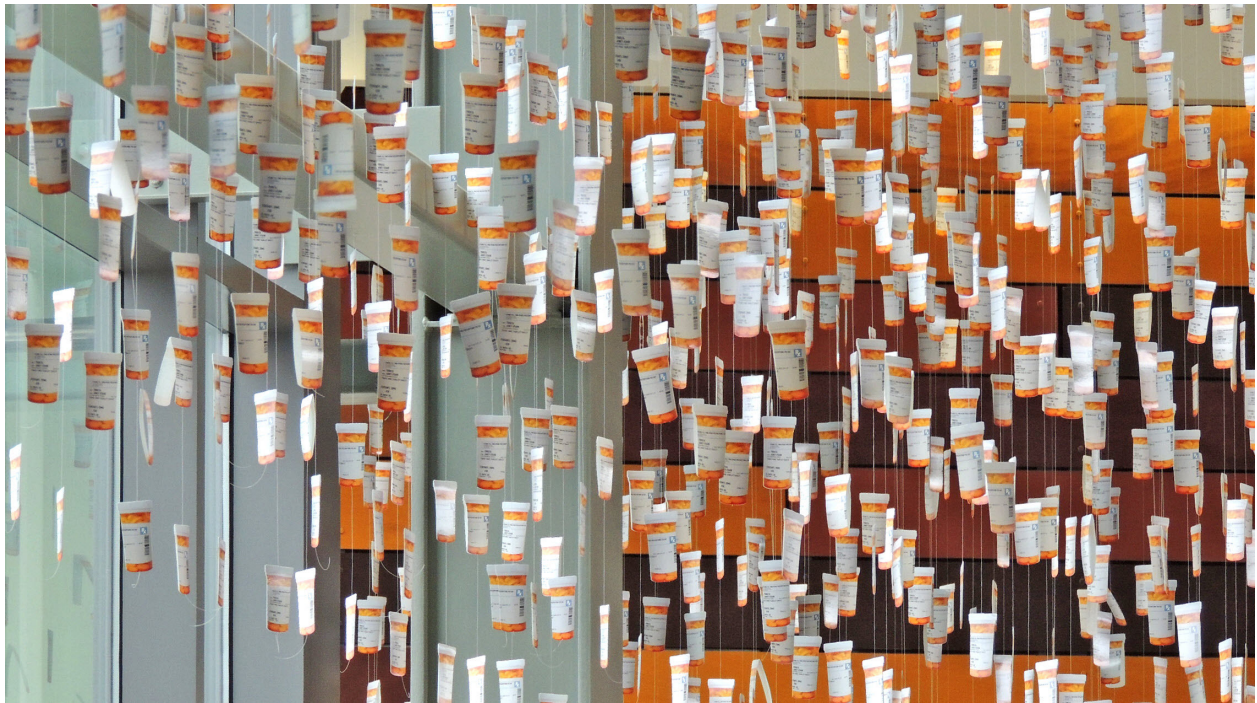
There was minimal financial support needed to start the opioid response work at SLCL. The library allocated approximately \$3,000 in their budget to purchase additional naloxone kits for staff use. Additional staff time was needed to promote and participate in the training at all of the locations. Utah Naloxone provides the library with injectable naloxone kits to distribute to the public. The Use Only as Directed is a statewide prevention campaign, supported financially with a combination of state and county funds, and support from Intermountain Healthcare.

## Local Conditions Leading Up to the Library’s Response

Local factors and conditions that led to SLCL’s response to the opioid crisis with their community partners include:

- passionate staff who care about the communities they serve





Use Only as Directed pill bottle display.  
Photo courtesy of Salt Lake County Library

- observing that the community was, and is, in crisis
- existing collaborations with other county divisions that brought awareness of the library's strengths in reaching the community

The library staff care about the community they serve and want to support those in need. Because they are embedded in the community, staff sees the need for the opioid response activities on a regular basis. Moreover, working closely with the other county divisions such as the health department, parks and recreation, and aging services has allowed the library to see and understand the greater need to address the opioid crisis.

The library director noted that knowledge of the community, engagement in the branches, and the library's reach also informs the library's efforts, saying "We're passionate about our communities, and we care deeply about them. We're neighborhood libraries and are embedded within the community, so we know the population that we serve, and we see those individuals on a regular basis. We know that some of them are in crisis."

## Reactions and Experiences of Library Staff, Board, and Community Members

Overall the reactions and experiences of SLCL staff, the media, and impacted community members are positive and supportive of the library's opioid response activities.

### **LIBRARY STAFF AND BOARD**

When the library began their opioid response activities, staff had questions about their responsibility and potential liability with administering and distributing naloxone. The health department and Utah Naloxone addressed these concerns when they provided the naloxone training, which helped staff feel more comfortable. The library's implementation strategy first included training and ensuring managers were comfortable and supportive so they could then disseminate information to their staff and address any concerns. Eventually all library staff had the option to be trained in naloxone administration.

In addition, staff became supportive of the Use Only as Directed ad campaign and art installations, as time and effort was spent to educate the staff on the campaign's purpose and importance, along with getting their input on where it was placed and the messaging that was used.

The library's board has both advisory and policy-making responsibilities. Board members are very engaged with the services that the library provides and saw the opioid response activities as not only expanding their reach into the community, but also as an opportunity to make a difference in the community. It also opens up the possibility to find other ways to serve; as a board member stated, "I think that we're willing to put ourselves out there and be an active member of the community. This makes it possible to participate in other opportunities when they arise and improve people's lives."

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"The wonderful thing about libraries is the feeling that we're here because we like to help people. We want to make a difference in their lives, whether it's teaching them how to read, or working on a résumé, or helping them with computers. The opioid work just adds to this."

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—Salt Lake County Library Frontline Staff

## MEDIA

Prior to the naloxone distribution being completely ready to launch, the local news aired a story promoting the opportunity to the public and that they could pick up naloxone at all 18 SLCL branches. The library and their partners were not fully set up with training or materials when the announcement was made, but other than this initial timing mishap, the media covered both the naloxone kit distribution and art installation in positive terms. Multiple television and radio news stations aired stories, including one in neighboring Idaho. Partners of the library also shared that the media has been supportive of their work and that the media was trying to accurately depict what was going on in the community versus sensationalizing it.

## COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Some community members had questions about the possibility of attracting people with substance use disorder into the library because of the availability of naloxone. They also expressed concerns that the library would feel less safe. These concerns were addressed as more information was shared about the opioid crisis, who is affected by it, and the importance of being ready to support and serve the community in an emergency.

The naloxone distribution program is reaching a wide range of community members. For example, one library staff person shared, "There have been people who have said, 'I have a loved one who has cancer and I want to make sure that I have something.' Or we have people who say, 'My son or daughter is addicted, and I want two kits because I want one in my car and I want one at my house.' We've had someone who has lost a family member to substance use disorder and wants to have the tools to not have that happen again. We've had people say they've had to use one of the kits previously. We've had a kid tell us that his parents are struggling with addiction. It's across the board what we get. And then some people don't tell us anything. They just take the kit."

One community member who picked up a naloxone kit from the library shared, "I live in a community shelter where there are a lot of opioids being abused, and I'll get woken up at 3 o'clock in the morning with someone yelling, 'Does anyone have Narcan?' So it's like it finally hit me. I need to start carrying it."

## Outcomes of the Library's Response

Some of the positive outcomes that have occurred as a result of SLCL's opioid programming, include:

- **Greater understanding of the role of the library.** The partners working to implement the opioid response work and the broader

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“We’re so grateful to libraries for their willingness to do this because it is sensitive messaging. We understand that culturally it has a lot of stigma associated with it and a lot of misinformation, and that can be a delicate thing. But their willingness to address that, become ambassadors, and help eliminate some of that misinformation is a huge benefit to the community as a whole.”

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—Community Partner Director

community needs around this crisis have a greater understanding of the role of libraries and other ways libraries can contribute to a community.

- **Heightened awareness of the opioid crisis by community members.** The presence of the art installations has encouraged patrons to ask questions and have conversations about opioids and overdoses. It has also elicited suggestions from the public on where to have other naloxone distribution sites and campaign materials.
- **New partnerships.** The library has new partnerships as a result of the work, including with Utah Naloxone (out of the University of Utah), and the State of Utah’s Use Only as Directed campaign. In addition, the library now partners with the Utah Department of Public Safety to distribute gun locks to the public, an opportunity that surfaced because of their successful distribution of naloxone.
- **Information shared with other libraries.** Salt Lake County Library has been contacted by other library systems interested in learning how SLCL implemented this work because these libraries would like to support their communities in similar ways.
- **Distribution of over 1,300 naloxone kits** to the public, throughout the system’s 18 branch libraries.

The library and their partners at Utah Naloxone do not formally track distribution and use of

the naloxone kits for fear that collecting this information might drive people away from accessing them. The library does have an optional survey which staff complete after distributing kits to the public. Details recorded include the date it was received, the number of kits requested, and the branch location. If the recipient of the kit(s) voluntarily shares additional information as to why they are requesting the kit(s), or how they heard about the program, that information is added to the survey by staff.

#### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS

There were many factors that contributed to the success of the library’s opioid response activities, including the following:

- **Strong partnerships that already existed.** SLCL already had strong partnerships with other government divisions in the county from working together on other community issues.
- **Strong support.** Salt Lake County’s mayor and County Council are supportive of addressing opioids and have trust in their county agencies.
- **Messaging coming from multiple, credible organizations.** Many organizations in Salt Lake are sharing the same messaging about the importance of preventing opioid addiction, emphasizing it is not just a city or public health issue but the entire community’s issue.
- **Highly motivated staff.** The library personnel, ranging from custodial staff to



the administrators, have a passion for, and commitment to, making the community better for everyone.

- **Champions to drive the work forward.** Within Salt Lake County, there have been multiple champions at the various organizations innovating, leading, and driving the work forward in collaboration with their partners. This includes staff and champions that bring years of experience and expertise from previous roles related to substance abuse prevention.



Use Only as Directed campaign display and naloxone kits.  
Photo courtesy of Salt Lake County Library

## Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities

Through the course of developing and implementing the opioid response activities, SLCL experienced challenges, needs, and identified opportunities for the work moving forward.

### CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

- The **stigma of addiction** present in the community might cause some people to not seek the help they need or may prevent others from helping loved ones.

- Related, there is a need for **more community-wide education** as there is misinformation circulating about possible opioid contamination if you administer naloxone and that providing free naloxone increases opioid use.
- More education is needed for providers and patients to **reduce opioid prescriptions**.
- **More media coverage** is needed about the library's opioid response work and generally about how the community is being affected by the opioid crisis.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The following are ongoing and future needs to support efforts to best address the opioid crisis:

- **Generate staff buy-in** with any new program implementation, including starting at the top and getting leadership buy-in to help disseminate the information to the rest of the staff.
- **Start as soon and as robustly as possible**, and do not let striving for perfection keep efforts from beginning.
- A **continuous and reliable source of naloxone kits** are needed for distribution to the public.
- **Ensure programming** is ready to launch before media is involved.
- **Keep the work simple** so partners, staff, and the public can easily engage with the programming and feel empowered.
- **Provide supplemental education with the naloxone kit** so patrons without a medical background can easily utilize the kit and consider providing only nasal injections to increase ease of use.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this case study do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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## NOTES

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