

BERKS COUNTY MORTALITY REVIEW TEAM

2025



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TEAM PURPOSE

In alignment with Act 101 of 2022, the Berks County Commissioner's passed a resolution to allow for the creation of a Berks Mortality Review Team (MRT) on March 23rd, 2023, chaired by the Council on Chemical Abuse and the Berks County MH/DD Program. The purpose of the MRT is to review loss of life for individuals either by overdose or suicide. Through this process, information about the decedent is gathered including interactions with services and systems, identification of missed opportunities, and other valued information that can be used for future prevention or intervention.



MISSION



VALUE



VISION

TEAM ORGANIZATION

MRT START-UP

The Berks County MRT members began to meet in October of 2023. For the remainder of 2023 and the majority of 2024, our team focused on:

- Team representation
- Confidentiality agreement
- Training and learning from already existing teams in other locations; including next of kin interview training for team members
- Establishing protocols for reviews
- Identifying process for Coroner's Office to contact next of kin including letter and resources to be included

TEAM REPRESENTATION:

- Psychologist/Addiction- Team Lead
- Council on Chemical Abuse
- MH/DD Program
- Behavioral Health Managed Care Organization
- Community Treatment Providers- Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders
- Physician/Addiction Medicine
- Coroner's Office
- District Attorney
- Crisis Intervention
- Area Agency on Aging
- Veteran's Affairs
- Advocacy Organizations

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

BERKS COUNTY'S MRT HAS ESTABLISHED THAT REVIEWS WILL ONLY BE CONDUCTED FOR INDIVIDUALS OF WHOM NEXT OF KIN AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW. EFFORTS TO CONTACT NEXT OF KIN THROUGH THE CORONER'S OFFICE OCCUR WITH CONSIDERATION TO TIME SINCE THE LOSS OF LIFE AND AVOIDANCE OF OTHER TRIGGERING EVENTS, SUCH AS BIRTHDAYS, ANNIVERSARY OF DEATH, HOLIDAYS, ETC.

THE FOLLOWING REFLECTS LETTERS MAILED OUT FROM CORONER'S OFFICE:

LOSS OF LIFE DATE	SUICIDE	OVERDOSE	TOTAL	RETURNED	% OF MAILING	DATE MAILED
JANUARY THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2024	59	50	109	12	11.0%	12/2025
2021	175 TOTAL		175			05/2025
2022/2023	133	235	368	46	12.5%	11/2024

NEXT OF KIN INTERVIEWS COMPLETED (DECEDENT DATA)

Interviews 2025	Gender		Age Range			
	Male	Female	Up to 18	19-45	46-60	61 +
Suicide	7	0	0	3	1	3
Overdose	6	0	0	3	3	0

Interviews 2024	Gender		Age Range			
	Male	Female	Up to 18	19-45	46-60	61 +
Suicide	1	0	0	0	1	0
Overdose	1	0				

INTERVIEW TAKE AWAYS

While the data we have from our reviews is currently limited and doesn't necessarily translate to a trend, some themes have emerged. These include:

-**Stigma**, which impacts individuals from accessing treatment and other supports, continues to exist especially for certain target populations including males with substance use disorders and older adults with mental health concerns.

-Concern for individuals in need of substance use treatment during incarceration and for **connection to treatment as they return to the community**.

-Family frustration with limited involvement or **information that could not be shared** with them during their loved one's treatment experience. An example of this was a family indicating that if someone had told them their loved one wasn't showing up for Intensive Outpatient Treatment, maybe they could have intervened differently.

-Several Next of Kin identified an interest in receiving **outreach or follow-up after the loss**. This included such things as: connecting with their loved one's Primary Care Provider, receiving resources related to loss support for their family, and gaining clarity by reconnecting with law enforcement, especially in overdose situations.



IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES

- Work with Primary Care Providers to further educate about symptoms of behavioral health concerns and where to turn for assistance. This includes additional screening measures for treating chronic pain or depression/suicidal ideation. Several Next of Kin identified Primary Care Provider offices as the only place their loved one was open to receiving care. This spring, a radio talk show hosted by a physician with a targeted older adult following tackling the topic of mental health in older adults occurred. An article on behavioral health needs of older adults will also be included in an upcoming issue of our Medical Society's newsletter.
- Offer training and resources on the identification of behavioral health risk factors for other extended care providers such as hospice, home health workers, meals on wheels, etc. Some of the reviews involved the loss of life for individuals who were caregivers for their spouses.
- More community marketing on where and how to access supportive services.
- Compilation of resources or action steps needed after an event to decrease the mental and emotional burden on grieving families. Basic checklists for bills; meal planning, groceries, agencies that deal with environmental clean-up, gun removal, etc.
- Continued efforts by Loss Team for engagement with the Funeral Directors to share information about the availability of the team for family and friends.



MORTALITY REVIEW TEAM 2026

The Berks County Mortality Review Team continues to meet monthly dependent on Next of Kin, who respond to outreach letters and indicate interest. The team continues to evaluate our existing processes and information gleaned from interviews that can be utilized to make a difference in prevention of loss of life by suicide or overdose.

