



# Paramedics can link overdose survivors to long-term recovery through COPE

Research shows that **overdose survivors are more likely to have subsequent overdoses**, making this population highly vulnerable to overdose deaths in the long term. Recent overdose survivors may be more open to intervention outside of the hospital setting and after the immediate event, creating a **critical window for intervention** to treat substance use disorder and enhance public health in our communities.

South Carolina's **Community Outreach Paramedic Education (COPE)** program uses referrals from EMS

or hospitals to identify survivors for follow up visits in this critical period. Through COPE, paramedics visit a survivor at their residence following a Narcan administration or overdose event (typically within 72 hours). During the visit, the patient will receive educational materials and a **"warm handoff" to drug treatment and peer support**. COPE teams make up to three attempts to reach an individual. The COPE outreach team can also meet with family or friends of overdose survivors to help connect them to support they need.

Providing a **timely linkage to relevant services and resources** for overdose survivors not only improves their health outcomes, it also

improves public safety, reduces costs associated with drug-related incidents, and improves community relationships with first responders. COPE is especially useful in rural areas where emergency medical services are sometimes the closest link to medical treatment.

## COPE Team Structure

## Community Outreach Paramedic Education

Multidisciplinary teams have demonstrated the strongest evidence for success in linking people with appropriate treatment. A COPE team generally consists of three participants: one paramedic, one law enforcement officer, and one peer support specialist, mental health counselor, or social worker. The paramedic typically conducts a wellness check during the visit, while the peer support specialist takes the lead in engaging the individual about recovery and linking them to services that meet his or her needs.

## Eligibility for COPE

Any EMS agency with paramedics is eligible, once they complete a contract and training through the DHEC Bureau of Public Health Preparedness (PHP). This includes motivational interview training and training to test for HIV/Hep-C.

## Ready to learn more?

COPE is administered through the DHEC Bureau of PHP, which has grant funding available to support EMS agencies and their partners for the COPE program. Contact Kenny Polson for more information at (803) 429-9636 or [polsonkb@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:polsonkb@dhec.sc.gov).

Case Study: COPE in Pickens County:

[https://www.sccounties.org/sites/default/files/uploads/resources/pickens\\_cope\\_program.pdf](https://www.sccounties.org/sites/default/files/uploads/resources/pickens_cope_program.pdf)



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