



## Answering the Call: How COAST Provides Substance Use Disorder Help When It Matters Most

By Alison Pfaff

In the Capital Region and Hudson Valley, a revolutionary approach to substance use disorder treatment is breaking down barriers and saving lives. The Coordinated Opioid and Stimulant Treatment (COAST) program offers something that was previously unavailable to many struggling with substance use disorder: immediate help when they need it most. For individuals battling opioid or stimulant substance use disorder, getting timely help can mean the difference between recovery and tragedy. COAST provides a 24/7 support line connecting callers directly to substance use disorder specialists across eight counties in the Capital Region and Hudson Valley.

"It's a simple thing," explains Kevin Connally, executive director of Hope House and President of the Board of Directors of the Capital Behavioral Health Network, the organization behind COAST. "We put out an 800 number, people call, somebody answers the phone, the person says, 'Hey, listen, I'm in trouble,' and we help them."

This streamlined approach addresses a critical gap in substance use disorder services. Kelly Lane, Director of Regional Projects for CBHN, notes, "Prior to this, there was a challenge around prescriber availability within organizations; people would have to wait at least two weeks, sometimes more, to get an appointment for medication. There were challenges, hoops that folks would have to jump through that really turned people off."

The COAST program is remarkably simple: anyone in crisis can simply call (866) 930-4999 and be connected with a team member who assesses their needs and links them to the most appropriate specialist. The program provides nurse practitioners available around the clock to assist with buprenorphine prescriptions, one of the most frequently requested services. COAST is funded by New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS).

Candace Ellis, executive director of Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services in Albany, explains how Project Safe Point acts as the first point of contact for two key initiatives under the Capital Behavioral Health Network, COAST (Coordinated Opioid and Stimulant Treatment) and the Low Threshold Buprenorphine Project.

"We answer calls, conduct initial triage, and connect individuals to the appropriate service," Ellis said. "Most clients call seeking buprenorphine prescriptions, and we have three nurse practitioners available 24/7 to assist. Previously, accessing this medication involved delays or limited availability, but now individuals can connect over the phone within hours. There has been a major expansion in prescribing practices, making it much easier for individuals to access treatment and address withdrawal symptoms."

COAST goes beyond medication, offering



comprehensive support including case management, peer navigation, syringe exchange, and hepatitis C programming.

Follow-up is a crucial component of the program. Within 48 hours of the initial call, COAST staffers will follow up, making sure medications were received, prescriptions filled, and to identify any additional issues. From treatment concerns to basic necessities like food access, support is available for those who need it.

"We created a low barrier access to getting someone what they need in that moment, free, confidential, and then they get connected to a whole bunch of other services in their home community," says Lane. "We're meeting them where they are. We're creating that front door, and we're making it very easy for folks to get connected."

Behind COAST's success is a remarkable network of organizations working in concert, coordinated by the Capital Behavioral Health Network (CBHN). This collaboration enables a level of service that no single organization could provide alone. "We come together and we're able to provide services as a group that probably none of the agencies could do by themselves," Connally explains. "We hold each other accountable. We work with each other."

Dorothy Cucinelli, CEO of CBHN, describes her organization's role: "We're like the glue that holds all of these organizations together for projects like COAST. We bring together groups of similar organizations that can deliver services and we coordinate those services, which allows the members to operate a larger project regionally that they otherwise couldn't do on their own." This coordination allows frontline providers to focus on what they do best: helping clients. Meanwhile CBHN is well equipped to handle the

administrative infrastructure. Lane agrees: "By doing what we do very well – the administrative coordination, data collection, financial management work – it allows organizations to do the work that they do very well."

COAST's impact extends beyond individual clients to their families, who often feel desperate and helpless when a loved one is struggling with substance use disorder. Through COAST, families receive guidance and support during these critical moments. "Not only are we helping to personalize the addiction, but we're giving some hope to the family," Connally adds.

The COAST program represents a fundamental shift in substance use disorder treatment accessibility. Before this initiative, many people went without necessary medication, often ending up in emergency rooms with no follow-up care plan. "For people that are not in this field, and even for people that are, it's really confusing," says Cucinelli. "If you're just an average person and you've got an addiction and you know you need help, what you need in the moment is somebody to tell you, 'I can help you.'"

The journey to recovery is rarely straightforward. That's why the program's direct approach – having a real person answer calls and guide callers through the process – has proven transformative. "We've had people tell us that it's lifesaving," Cucinelli adds.

COAST's variety of services include peer advocates who meet people where they are, offering immediate help to those ready to consider treatment. This can provide a critical lifeline at the moment of readiness. The impact of this work manifests in powerful testimonials. Connally shares, "I've had clients come up to me and say, 'I hated Hope House. I hated your staff. I hated everything about you guys. But I love you guys. You've saved my life.'"

Through the collaborative strength of its provider network and the administrative support of CBHN, COAST continues to transform substance use disorder care across the region, proving that when organizations work together, lives can truly be changed.

If you or someone you love needs help with opioid or stimulant substance use disorder, call the COAST support line at (866) 930-4999, available 24/7, 365 days a year.

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