

Educating. Raising Awareness. Shaping Policy.



## An Amazing Year in Review!

### Education. Awareness. Public Policy.

With the support of so many volunteers, donors, and organizations, the *Fentanyl Free Communities Foundation* has focused on three crucial pillars: **education, awareness, and public policy**. Through education, we offer comprehensive information about the dangers of fentanyl, enabling individuals to make informed choices. By raising awareness through campaigns and media channels, community events and outreach, we aim to enhance understanding and diminish stigma. Moreover, our active involvement in public policy empowers us to advocate for more stringent regulations, enhanced treatment access, and comprehensive harm reduction strategies.

**Through these collective efforts, our goal is to foster fentanyl-free communities and ensure a healthier, safer future for everyone.**

By now, you have seen the statistics. By some estimates, a little over 1,000 Minnesotans and more than 112,000 Americans are killed by fentanyl or its toxic relatives yearly. These are not just numbers. Ask your neighbors, friends, and extended family. Chances are someone you know is impacted by this plague.

It is just as likely, however, that the families who have lost loved ones to fentanyl continue to live in deep pain and grief - too often living in the shadows of despair, unwarranted shame, and a loss of hope.

Our mission is to help SAVE LIVES and create FENTANYL-FREE COMMUNITIES throughout Minnesota. Achieving this mission requires broad partnerships and community collaboration. Our work and advocacy is building upon what is already being done to fight the opioid crisis.

The good news is that there is so much we can do to save lives. Through education and outreach, we can build fentanyl-free communities. We focused our efforts and resources supporting youth all around the state of Minnesota.

### *Fentanyl Free Communities Board of Directors 2023-24*

- *Michele Hein*, Chairwoman FFCF
- *Paul Ostrow*, Treasurer FFCF, Chair Policy Committee
- *Michelle Loberg*, Chair, Programming and Outreach Committee
- *Medaria 'Rondo' Arradondo*, former Minneapolis Chief of Police
- *Michael Freeman*, former Hennepin County Attorney
- *Greg Hansen*, Community Advocate, Union Steward, Star Tribune
- *Thomas B. Heffelfinger*, former U.S. Attorney
- *Brian Hilgardner*, Community Advocate, Principal Engineer at Bolton & Menk
- *John Kingrey*, former Executive Director Minnesota County Attorneys Association
- *Suzanne Nash*, Community Advocate, Indigenous Peoples Task Force
- *Ryan Vasquez*, Community organizer, Cedar-Riverside Community Council and political consultant

Minnesota has one of the worst racial disparities in fentanyl deaths in America – a person of color is three times more likely to die, and a member of a tribal nation is seven times more likely to die. We continue to forge relationships with the Hmong, Karen, East African and Native American communities who are experiencing the highest levels of fentanyl abuse.

The priorities of law enforcement, prosecutors, and the Courts reflect the scope of this danger. Drug task forces increasingly focus on prosecuting fentanyl traffickers and getting fentanyl off the street. Prosecutors and the courts place urgency on expediting intervention and treatment for defendants possessing small amounts of fentanyl for personal use only. Law enforcement agencies have additional tools and resources to hold fentanyl dealers accountable – especially when the fentanyl they sell results in death.

## ***Fentanyl Free Communities Foundation Accomplishments during our Inaugural Year:***

- Introduced and implemented the ***PAUSE4Life Program***
- Attended and Exhibited dozens of community events bringing fentanyl awareness/education/prevention resources to attendees in the following communities: Chisago, Isanti, Braham, Cambridge, Edina, Elk River, Minneapolis, Mankato, Rochester, St. Cloud, Saint Paul, Columbia Heights, Bloomington, Big Lake and more...
- Coordinated meetings with local law enforcement agencies in several counties and jurisdictions throughout Minnesota
- Attended events and summits hosted by the Drug Enforcement Agency, Department of Justice, Roundtables with US Attorney Andy Luger, Senator Amy Klobuchar, and Representative Angie Craig
- Supported families searching for justice – developed [\*"If I Only Would Have Known"\*](#) Video available via QR Code:
- Partnered with other local and national non-profits fighting the fentanyl crisis
- FFCF Board chair Michele Hein joined Representative Angie Craig's Council on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder and the Hennepin County Opioid Action Council. She also will serve her second term on the Chisago County Opioid Action Council in 2025
- Sponsored awareness/fundraiser and retirement event of Paul Ostrow, Chair of FFC Policy committee
- Hosted Inaugural Gala with 220 attendees – generating more than \$60,000 in financial contributions
- Volunteered at Steve Rummier Hope Network to pack hundreds of Narcan rescue packs
- Awarded a Chisago County Opioid Action Council Grant
- Spoke at Chisago Lakes Area Schools Safe Kids symposiums
- Presented at St. Paul Optimists, Chanhassen Rotary, and GOP SD District 47
- Increased our volunteer base to 27 dedicated advocates



## The PAUSE4Life Program

Adolescence is a crucial stage of development when teenagers transition from familial influence to a broader social sphere. During this period, peer influence becomes immensely powerful. The PAUSE communications program has harnessed this influence by targeting the “pause” – the critical moment of contemplation before a young person decides to consume an illicit substance.

**By striving to meet young people where they are at, PAUSE reinforces life-saving messages and promotes harm-reduction strategies within peer groups.**

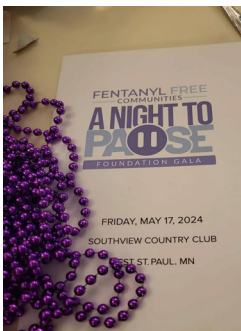
## Why PAUSE Matters

The **PAUSE4Life Program** emphasizes the dangers of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that can be lethal in minute doses and is often undetectably laced into other illicit substances. This approach equips adolescents with the knowledge to abstain or utilize harm-reduction methods when faced with the critical decision to use an illicit substance.

**The PAUSE program provides them with up-to-date information from trusted sources like the CDC, NIH, and SAMHSA, ensuring they are well-equipped in their decision making.**

## Chisago County Grant awarded to FFCF

This year, FFCF was awarded funding from the Chisago County Opioid Action Council to implement the Pause Program for law enforcement and community agencies. This first-of-its-kind program will provide content and outreach support, establish a Chisago County Fentanyl Free Network of community based non-profits, and connect with families of loss through the Chisago County Faces of Fentanyl in the community. We are incredibly excited about moving into this new area of work and hope to expand the program to rural, suburban, and metro counties this year.



## The Fentanyl Free Communities Foundation Inaugural Gala

The inaugural gala of the Fentanyl Free Communities Foundation, held on Friday, May 17, 2024, was a huge success, thanks to the incredible support from so many people. The ballroom was filled, and we raised essential funds to promote education and awareness through the Pause4Life program and community events.

One recurring theme from the evening was clear: people’s eyes are now wide open to the dangers of illicit fentanyl. Keep telling our stories. Share what you learned and what you now know. Because we can guarantee you a life will be saved.



*Rep. Angie Craig and Sheriff Dawanna Witt*

## Celebrating a Milestone: The Fentanyl Free Communities Foundation's Inaugural Event



In an evening filled with hope, unity, and a steadfast commitment to combatting the fentanyl crisis, the Fentanyl Free Communities Foundation, which Michele Hein chairs, hosted its first-ever event. This significant gathering was a celebration of Paul Ostrow's retirement and the beginning of his journey as the new chair of the Fentanyl Free Communities Policy Board. Local news network Fox 9 News was on hand to cover the event, providing a glimpse into the foundation's mission and the community's support for this vital cause.

### Legislative Advocacy Shaped Public Policy

Fentanyl Free Communities is an organization dedicated to impactful Fentanyl Policy Advocacy efforts. We collaborate closely with the Minnesota legislature, championing policies that address the fentanyl crisis head-on. Our focus is on mitigating the devastating effects of fentanyl and driving initiatives that safeguard community well-being.

- Partnered with other advocacy organizations and leaders to pass legislation increasing penalties for fentanyl trafficking.
- Testified in support of reclassification of fentanyl to be equal to heroin in the schedule of drugs and for penalties for sale/distribution.
- Supported requirements for the availability of Narcan in Minnesota schools.



*Fentanyl Awareness Rally at the Minnesota State Capitol*

### Advocates for Change are IN Community

Tripods cradle photographs of loved lives lost, windows into souls taken too soon by fentanyl's merciless grip. Each face tells the story of a life cut tragically short. These are the children of Michele and Michelle, and others too, whose deaths have sparked a relentless pursuit of change. Day in and day out, at events – FFCF stands vigilant, their presence a manifestation of love transcending the physical realm. What drives a person to this kind of volunteer work, to forgo the quiet retreat into years meant for rest and reflection? Fentanyl has shattered any illusion of peace for them, demanding action in the face of overwhelming loss.



*Michele Hein, FFCF Chair, Paul Ostrow, Policy Chair & Michelle Loberg, Programming Chair*

