



Office of Mayor Kim Lund
City of Bellingham

Addressing the Fentanyl Crisis in Downtown Bellingham
Executive Order 2024-01

An Executive Order directing City departments to immediately expand the City's public health and safety infrastructure and actions, in partnership with other stakeholders, to further combat the fentanyl crisis, with a focus on downtown Bellingham.

WHEREAS, the United States is facing the worst drug crisis in its history, with resulting tragedies decimating families and contributing to extraordinary levels of despair in our communities, including in Bellingham and surrounding areas; and

WHEREAS, What-Comm 911 dispatch center data shows that, of the 788 calls placed to 911 for suspected overdoses county-wide in 2023, 581 of those calls, or 74 percent, were within the City of Bellingham; and

WHEREAS, Bellingham Fire/EMS responded to a 67 percent increase in overdose-related incidents within its service area in 2023 when compared to 2022 (537 in 2022, 898 in 2023); and

WHEREAS, [WhatcomOverdosePrevention.org](https://www.whatcomoverdoseprevention.org) reports that overdose deaths in Whatcom County have markedly increased every year since 2018, with a 49.5 percent increase reported in 2023 when compared to 2022 (91 in 2022, 136 in 2023); and

WHEREAS, according to an opinion article in *The Seattle Times* published February 16, 2024, no state in the U.S. saw a more significant increase in drug overdose deaths than Washington, with an increase of 38.5 percent, from 2022 to 2023; and

WHEREAS, in addition to being a leading cause of preventable death in our country, substance use disorders affect brain function and increase behaviors that cause negative outcomes for individuals, their families, their social networks and the community; and

WHEREAS, the fentanyl crisis, an affordable housing and homelessness crisis, and critical lack of adequate incarceration, behavioral health and treatment support systems are contributing to urgent conditions felt throughout our community and especially in our downtown; and

WHEREAS, opioids and synthetic drugs, most notably fentanyl and methamphetamine, are powerful, highly addictive, cheap, widely available, and deadly; and

WHEREAS, the City, partner agencies and other organizations and individuals have taken many steps to address these issues, including by increasing law enforcement and security services, diversion and alternative response programs, community education, and other actions; and

WHEREAS, despite these and other multi-year, multi-million-dollar efforts, increasing numbers of people in our community are suffering from substance use disorders and other harms related to the fentanyl crisis and further efforts are needed to reduce these harms; and

WHEREAS, the City amended Bellingham Municipal Code Chapter 10.08 in April and August 2023 to prohibit the use of controlled substances in public places; and

WHEREAS, on April 11, 2023, the Biden Administration designated a fentanyl-laced drug cocktail an “emerging threat” to public safety, and committed to “cracking down on the production, sales and trafficking of illicit fentanyl to help save lives, protect public health, and improve the public safety of our communities;” and

WHEREAS, in June 2023, the City joined a coalition of government agencies, community-based organizations, healthcare providers, and others from across Whatcom County in a Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group in response to the local fentanyl crisis; and

WHEREAS, on September 21, 2023, the Lummi Indian Business Council declared a state of emergency in response to the fentanyl crisis and the increasing number of tragic overdose deaths in the tribal community; and

WHEREAS, on January 9, 2024, the Whatcom County Council adopted two resolutions related to the opioid crisis, calling on President Biden and Governor Inslee to declare respective federal and state-wide states of emergency; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Council is considering further action to address the fentanyl crisis, which may include requesting a county state of emergency be declared and providing staff and financial resources to local efforts; and

WHEREAS, the City will continue its partnership with local, regional and federal stakeholders to address the public safety and public health impacts of the fentanyl crisis within our communities, including building on its investments toward delivering care to the most vulnerable; and

WHEREAS, open drug use, associated overdoses, and related activities continue to have an adverse and disproportionate impact on downtown businesses, residences and community spaces; and

WHEREAS, the first weeks of 2024 have seen an alarming increase in overdoses, particularly downtown. In January 2024, What-Comm 911 dispatch received a 100 percent increase in reports of suspected overdose incidents within the City limits, when compared to January 2023 (37 in January 2023, 75 in January 2024). The downtown area has seen a 375 percent increase in calls reporting suspected overdoses, when compared to January 2023 (8 in January 2023, 38 in January 2024); and

WHEREAS, similarly, during January 2024, Bellingham Fire/EMS responded to 104, or an estimated 3.47 per day, overdose-related incidents in its service area; 30 of those responses, or nearly 1 call per day, were downtown; and

WHEREAS, additional short-term and long-term City actions are urgently needed to disrupt drug-dealing and other drug-related activities, to ensure protection and support for individuals suffering from substance use disorders, and to provide a safe, welcoming, thriving community for all, particularly in downtown Bellingham.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Kimberley Lund, Mayor of Bellingham, hereby order the following actions to address these concerns and mitigate the harm they cause to our community, to preserve life, and to disrupt the sale and use of drugs in public places:

- A. Immediately establish a downtown public safety response office, using existing City space, to serve as a downtown base of operations for Bellingham Fire/EMS, Police and other response service partners. This allows first responders direct access to downtown incidents and activities.
- B. Immediately expand the focus of the Bellingham Fire Department's Community Paramedic Program to provide a quick response to overdoses in the downtown area and to expand outreach and treatment options to individuals suffering from substance use disorders.
- C. Immediately explore how the City can support expanded access to methadone and other opioid treatments in high overdose areas, in coordination with other agencies.
- D. Immediately form an internal task force, staffed by Police, Fire, Public Works and others, to coordinate weekly operations to enhance safety and well-being and disrupt drug-related criminal activity downtown and in other areas.
- E. Immediately prioritize enforcement of laws prohibiting the sale and distribution of illegal drugs within the City, especially through renewed partnership between the Bellingham Police Department and the Whatcom County Drug and Gang Task Force and other federal entities directly related to the enforcement of these laws.
- F. Immediately provide increased, more visible Police presence downtown, through additional emphasis patrols and community engagement activities.
- G. Continue prioritizing expanded recruiting initiatives for commissioned officers to support increased patrols and enable the eventual reintroduction of specialty units.
- H. Immediately increase the frequency of Public Works cleaning, litter control and other sanitation services downtown.
- I. Immediately form an internal work group to prepare a comprehensive downtown strategies plan to meet short and long-term needs. The goal of this work is to create and foster an increased environment of safety, economic vitality, and sense of community. The plan will include support for business and economic development, arts and cultural initiatives, new housing, and other ways to promote community solutions and bring people downtown.
- J. Support increased public education about substance use disorder and the local impacts of the current crisis, in collaboration with the Bellingham Public Library, Whatcom County Health and Community Services and other partners.
- K. Leverage all available resources to support the rebuilding of a healthy Bellingham community by pursuing financial resources at the county, state and federal levels to support these and related efforts.

This Executive Order is issued under the Mayor's inherent powers as the chief executive and administrative officer of the City of Bellingham and not using the Mayor's emergency powers under Bellingham Municipal Code 2.57.060. Questions regarding this Executive Order should be directed to the Mayor's Office, (360) 778-8100 or mayorsoffice@cob.org.

Dated this 20th day of February, 2024

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kimberley Lund", with a stylized, flowing script.

Kimberley Lund,
Mayor, City of Bellingham