

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Fentanyl Roundtable

June 5th, 2023

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Executive Somers: My name is Dave Somers, I'm the Snohomish County and we just had the most amazing, almost two hours, talking with county staff, the Senator, people with lived experience.

We are very interested in what we're doing and Snohomish County is trying to bring everybody together to work on this real plague that we have in front of us, which is fentanyl.

We've been working on issues, similar for many years with opioids, but fentanyl is a whole new beast. And we know we have to support each other on this.

We're deciding how to spend the opioid settlement dollars that we've gotten. And we just allocated the first \$1.4 million dollars to that. We want to know from everybody in the community, what's the best to use that money? How can we make a difference in people's lives?

I just recently lost my brother to fentanyl back in March. He was smart, funny, capable, a wonderful human being and we heard today, some of the most amazing people too that have lived experience that are articulate, intelligent, smart, capable, and we're going to really look to them to help us figure out how to attack this problem. So that's my 30 seconds.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you Executive Somers, and I've been conducting the beginnings of a statewide tour listening to our communities across the state and listening to people like Executive Somers and those here with lived experiences, so that we can have a more federal coordinated response with local governments to fight this crisis.

It is a crisis and our nation needs to understand. When you hear from these individuals here today, you'll understand exactly how they've been trying to fight it on the frontlines.

We heard from law enforcement, we heard from first responders, we heard from our health care advocates in the community. We certainly heard about how we need more beds and bed capacity for treatment, and faster response, and that this particular fentanyl crisis is something that people haven't really seen.

The level of addiction, and its power is so strong and so high. The amount of fentanyl hitting our streets is so inexpensive, that it is reaching in ways that people really haven't imagined in our past crises.

Twice before we were really called on to have a more integrated approach, first with methamphetamine problems, and then with opioids. And it seems like this crisis has come back

even bigger and that is why we have to meet it at the national level with a task force response that helps the communities get the resources they need to fight it and coordinate with DEA and our local law enforcement to tackle this.

Clearly, behavioral health needs to be a priority and treatment needs to be part of the priority. And you'll hear from these individuals why that is so important, but I just thank them for sharing their stories today.

Snohomish County, I'm so sorry, Executive Somers for your own loss. And that's the point here it is a national crisis when it is reaching this level of impact.

And we hope that our public health can be part of this discussion. How does public health pivot from our COVID crisis to helping us deal with this fentanyl national crisis that we have?

So thank you and I don't know if we want to start down with you...

Lindsey Arrington: Sure. My name is Lindsay Arrington, and I run a local grassroots organization called HOPE Soldiers. The HOPE in HOPE Soldiers stands for handing out purpose everywhere. We are a peer support organization that helps people find freedom from addiction and mental health struggles.

I am a person with lived experience. I have been in recovery, long term recovery for 12 years. I celebrated 12 years of freedom from addiction in April this year. I strongly advocate for people who are unable to use their voice to speak to these issues.

I started this organization when I was two years into my own recovery and one of the things that we started with was bringing awareness to these issues. We are now blatantly aware of these issues and so now we focus on our other parts of our mission, which is to restore hope in the community and help love people back to life.

Taylor Madison is with me, she's one of my clients. She's somebody that I've been working with the past several years. One of the things that HOPE Soldiers offers that's very unique to other organizations is we provide round the clock support from the very beginning. Whether it's helping people get into treatment and housing, and then breaking other barriers that are stopping people from living their fullest potential.

And Taylor can speak more to that, but I'm super grateful to be able to be here today and to have been able to share my thoughts with Senator Cantwell and I feel like some of the main priorities here are access to treatment, removing barriers to accessing treatment, and mandating treatment for those who are unable to make the choice for themselves. Thank you.

Taylor Madison: Hi, my name is Taylor Madison. I'm an addict. I'm really grateful to be here today to be able to share my story and share what I think needs to happen, where from my path I see that there have been barriers or areas that could change.

I think something that's really important in this fentanyl epidemic is support, is helping those people who are lost, like I was.

Doing things quickly, when someone's ready, getting them the help that they need immediately, not a week or a month later, but immediately. As you know, that day, week, month might be too late. I think people need time.

Fentanyl is a whole new monster. It's not like meth, it's not like other opioids. It really insulates people and takes over all that they are.

I think long term care is one of the only effective means for combating this. You know, 28 days or five days, that's not enough. I personally did six months of long term inpatient and what was really key for me was tackling co-occurring disorders, not just tackling my addiction, but tackling my mental health issues as well, learning how to live a healthy life with those. Between medication, therapy, it took time, and it took work, and it took support. A lot of support.

I wouldn't have been able to do it by myself. I wouldn't be here today if I wouldn't have had the peer support that HOPE Soldiers has provided me holding my hand every step of the way. Figuring out things for me that I didn't know how to do, jumping through all those hoops.

You know, when you're in active addiction, if it's hard, you just keep doing what you know. So having organization behind me that was able to set everything up for me, so all I had to do was be there and as time went on put in the work. That was really key to my success. Thank you guys.

Kalei Kaneaiakala: My name is Kalei Kaneaiakala. I am a woman in recovery. I'm also a woman that works at The Everett Recovery Café, and also a woman that has a lot of lived experience.

One thing that I took away from the roundtable was that it looked like a good set of individuals for us to really come together and really start working as a team to combat this fentanyl thing going on out there, you know, people are dying. People aren't just overdosing, but people are dying, they're losing their lives.

I work in a recovery café where we have a lot of resources there and that when we help each other, we are also people in recovery.

And then I'm also a woman that's a very big participant, and in a Twelve Step Fellowship that has brought me here. And so I think that long term recovery, inpatient, outpatient, you know, I think that we can really make a difference if we work together as a community. As a community, start gathering all the tiny little pieces and somehow get this organization, peer to peer, human to human, and get this going on.

So I'm grateful to be here. I'm glad that we had this opportunity to all get together and chat. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens.

Kathie Lee: I am Kathie Lee, and my son died of an accidental overdose at college in 2015, just before the holidays. And I have since met with Snohomish County Health District, they did a forum where I met two other women and we decided to start the International Overdose Awareness Day and we host it here in Snohomish County.

We try to be as inclusive and try to dispel the stigma of the programs such as needle exchange, and housing, and also hear from personal stories. And each year we have a theme, and we try to highlight some of the programs that are very controversial. We're doing it again this year.

One of the things that was the worst for us is we did not fit the profile of an addicted son. We were a two parent family, we had income, we were well known in the community, volunteers, we did not fit the profile. So we are trying to dispel that this [isn't] an everybody problem, as you know Executive.

This does not go down party lines, it does not go down race lines, it does not go down age lines, and we try to highlight that it can happen to the 12 year old or the 50 year old. It does not matter. This is an everyone problem and I pretty much guarantee that it has affected someone's life one way or the other.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you.