The CONNECT Electronic Referral System is a secure, web-based platform that was developed in Helena in 2009. CONNECT is designed to be inclusive of any type of service provider, with the goal of creating the most comprehensive local, regional, and state-wide referral networks possible. Referrals can be sent from your client's home community to anywhere in the state, with referrals back to their home community for follow-up and support services. The closed-loop system facilitates a bi-directional flow of information, allowing provider-to-provider referrals to be tracked in real time from the moment they're sent until the referral is closed, with status updates and progress notes along the way. Visit connectmontana.org to locate a local CONNECT team member or get more information.

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WASTEWATER EPIDEMIOLOGY & OPIOIDS

The extent of opioid abuse and related pharmaceuticals in rural communities are not well described. While there are an array of endeavors and funding efforts to address this growing crisis (such as SAMHSA's State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis Grants), there is limited information on the efficacy of such interventions at the community level. As self-reporting surveys, prescribing and overdose information cannot convey the complete picture of drug use within a community, there is a demand for tools which can provide such data. Tracking aggregated use of drugs of abuse in community wastewater is an effective tool to identify drug use trends from a collective population over time. Wastewater epidemiology has recently emerged in response to this unmet demand. Near real-time biomonitoring of sewage drug biomarkers in wastewater can provide a snapshot of drugs of abuse being used in a community, identify drug use trends over time, identify new psychoactive substances, and identify geographic 'hotspots'. Sewage drug biomarkers have been used to estimate illicit drug consumption at a community level while protecting individual identity (Castiglioni, et al., 2013). These studies generally show good agreement with prevalence data from national epidemiological surveys demonstrating the potential of this approach to complement population surveys, crime statistics, medical records, and seizure data (van Nuijs, et al., 2011).

Dr. Deborah Keil, Associate Professor at MSU, will provide a brief presentation on how her team has implemented this approach for communities in Montana.