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Item Type	Abstract
Authors	Vuong, Ngoc
Citation	Vuong, Ngoc. 2022. The politics and policies of behavioral health and drug policy reform in Kansas -- In Proceedings: 21st Annual Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Forum. Wichita, KS: Wichita State University, p. 33
Publisher	Wichita State University
Download date	2026-05-16 21:45:58
Link to Item	<a href="https://soar.wichita.edu/handle/10057/23230">https://soar.wichita.edu/handle/10057/23230</a>

## The Politics and Policies of Behavioral Health and Drug Policy Reform in Kansas

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*Fairmount College of Liberal Arts & Sciences  
Social Sciences & Humanities Oral Presentation*

**Abstract:** Substantial increases in suicides and drug overdose deaths, the lack of access to behavioral health care, and the effects of structural stigma on people with mental illness and/or substance use disorders underlie the need for behavioral health and drug policy reform in Kansas. However, many of the evidence-based strategies to improve behavioral health and reduce substance-related harms in Kansas face notable barriers. As part of a broader study on stakeholders' attitudes toward behavioral health reform and their recommendations to improve the behavioral health care system in Kansas, two qualitative research projects were conducted on (1) stakeholders' attitudes toward primary care and behavioral health integration, mental health parity, social determinants of health, and school-based mental health services; and (2) stakeholders' recommendations to prevent overdoses, underage substance use, and other substance-related harms. In the first research project, there were 9 interviewees, including elected officials, state employees, members of mental health advocacy groups, and payers. In the second research project, there were 11 interviewees, including elected officials, law enforcement/criminal justice officials, health care professionals, and members of substance use prevention and recovery groups. Thematic analyses will be conducted on interviewees' responses to identify themes related to policy-level factors that affect mental illness and substance use disorders and behavioral health care in general. Themes from these two qualitative research projects will be juxtaposed for an overarching, preliminary narrative on behavioral health, harm reduction, and drug policy reform in Kansas.

Faculty Mentor: *Nikki Keene Woods, Rhonda Lewis*