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DRUG TASK FORCE COMBATING OPIOIDS IN FAYETTE COUNTY

Uniontown, PA – As the deadly opioid epidemic grows nationwide, the Fayette County Overdose Task Force is facing the problem head-on.

Spearheaded by the Fayette County Drug and Alcohol Commission, the task force was formed last year as a way to better understand and prevent overdose deaths.

Drug and Alcohol Executive Director Jana Kyle said the task force comprises Fayette County District Attorney Richard Bower, Fayette County Coroner Phillip Reilly, Fayette County Commissioners, representatives from Fayette County Children and Youth Services, Fayette EMS, Highlands Hospital, Uniontown Hospital, Pennsylvania State Police, Fayette Emergency Management Agency, Fayette County Behavioral Health Administration, various state and local elected officials, business owners and people in addiction recovery.

“Our members are growing and the people sitting around the table aren’t all in the same capacity,” Kyle said. “We’ve never had the ability to coordinate services before, so this has really brought much more collaboration, brainstorming and teamwork to the cause.”

The task force works in partnership with Laken Ethun of the University of Pittsburgh’s Technical Assistance Center’s Program Evaluation and Research Unit.

The partnership gives the task force access to the university’s Overdose Free PA Program, which works with coroners statewide to collect overdose death data for use by other entities.

“The data creates a bigger and better picture of the problem so we can figure out how to better deal with overdoses,” Kyle said.

The task force is using statistics gathered, such as gender, race, background, prior treatment information, areas of frequent overdose, where drugs are located on a person in overdose, emergency call frequency, hospital intervention and others, to develop a strategic plan to address the opioid problem.



Kyle said some of the task force's main goals are to reduce the stigma associated with addiction, increase education for professionals and ensure quality substance abuse disorder treatment available.

The task force is also training all first responders to carry NARCAN, a potentially life-saving spray designed to reverse the effects of opioid overdose, and educating citizens on the signs and symptoms of overdose, treatment and recovery options.

"It's about making Fayette County more educated about options available, providing recovery support and creating a centralized data repository, because we want to make informed decisions - not on what we think is happening, but what is actually happening," Kyle said.

Through the task force, Fayette EMS and the Drug and Alcohol Commission have developed a branch partnership that allows the latter to work directly with overdose survivors identified through emergency calls.

Another product of the task force is a collaboration with Children and Youth, allowing the Drug and Alcohol Commission to meet with their clients twice weekly, on-site to address substance abuse problems that may allow them to regain or retain custody of their children.

"We've never done anything like that before and that's the kind of collaboration we've wanted, because we're always working together as a task force to come up with ways that will really impact as many people as possible," Kyle said.

Fayette County Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink said that "while raising awareness is important, we must stop the problem before it gets started."

"That is where enforcement plays an extremely important role and, in addition, we must have justifiable collection of data, different treatment options and utilize evidence-based programs," Zimmerlink said.

"This is a war. It affects everyone in every part of our lives," Fayette County Commissioner Dave Lohr said. "The task force is a vital group gathering information and brainstorming to fight the problem."

Commissioner Vincent Vicites said the task force is vital to helping solve the county's number-one problem.

"We are being proactive, meeting on a regular basis to develop an action plan that will help our community overcome this epidemic," Vicites said. "Developing an action plan that is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the opioid epidemic is needed to tackle this problem."

"We encourage everyone in our community to help solve this problem. We have to do something to change this."



For more information on the Fayette County Overdose Task Force, visit www.fcdaa.org or call 724-438-3576.

“Our opioid epidemic is not one entity’s problem,” Kyle said. “It is a true community problem.”

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.info.

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