

## A Strategic Approach to The Opioid Misuse/Brain Injury Epidemic In NH

### Background:

The opioid crisis has led to a second “silent epidemic” of brain injuries nationwide and here in NH. For every overdose death, there are approximately fifty overdose survivors, 90% of whom become impaired because of insufficient oxygen to the brain. Brain injury is a little-known offshoot of NH’s drug crisis – but the connection between drug overdose and brain injury is real. 50% of people in substance abuse treatment have suffered at least one brain injury. Each year, in NH, as many as 5,000 people will suffer from the often-long-lasting effects of overdose-related brain injury.

### Proposed Solution:

Reduce the number of overdose-related brain injuries by launching a public awareness campaign aimed at 3 priority stakeholder groups (First Responders, Families and Teens). Through awareness and education, providers will be better able to identify brain injury early and recommend appropriate treatments. Families & caregivers who spend the most time with those at risk, will be trained to look for signs of brain injury over time. Finally, teens and young adults need to realize that recovery from an overdose could look very different if they survive with a brain injury. The New Hampshire Brain Injury and Substance Use Task Force would partner with members of each priority audience to a) raise awareness of the connection between brain injury and opioid overdose and b) implement training that will change behaviors and positively impact the identification and treatment protocols for treating drug overdose survivors who sustain a brain injury.

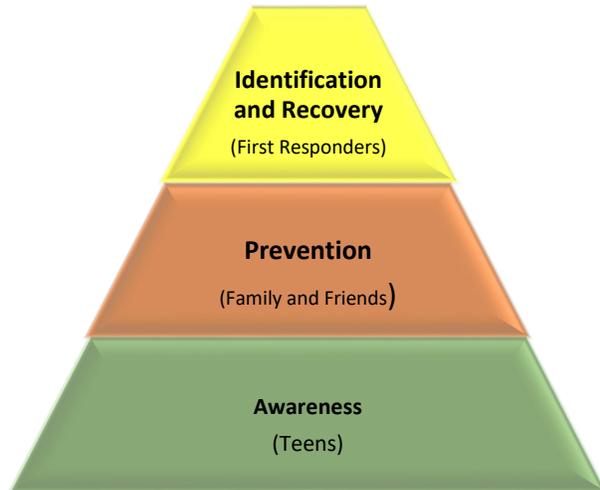
1. First responders, emergency room physicians & substance misuse

counselors. Those on the front lines who work directly with the people that overdose will be given education and resources to help improve outcomes from the first moments following medical stabilization. Modules will be aimed at early identification and establishing recovery pathways.

2. Families and caregivers. Individuals with a history of substance misuse are at the

greatest risk for brain injury and impacts to the brain are cumulative. However, those in the best position to recognize the signs of brain injury are often overwhelmed and in denial. Family members will be trained to identify signs of a brain injury and provided with resources to help them care most effectively for a loved one with an existing brain injury and/or substance misuse problem.

3. Teens. Team members will work with schools to incorporate information on brain injury resulting from opioid use by connecting with school nurses and health teachers, targeting grades 7 through high school. The goal is to educate young people about the connection between brain injury and opioid misuse/overdose in order to influence future behavior and decision-making around opioid use.



**Outcomes:**

- Increased levels of brain injury identification by first responders, ER physicians, medical “screeners” and substance misuse counselors. Increased referrals to rehabilitation centers.
- Increased number of families of opioid misuse patients who pursue further testing/support for brain injury for their loved ones
- Increased number of NH schools with opioid misuse and brain injury messages in curriculum for youth grades 7-12.