

# The SUD/Brain Injury and Mental Health Interagency Task Force Progress Report

## February 2021

### **Phase I: Strategic Plan Development, Jan – June 2019**

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.

In January 2019, the Brain Injury Association of NH assembled an interagency task force to develop a strategic plan to raise awareness of the connection between drug overdose and brain injury, develop educational resources and implement trainings to help with the prevention of brain injury and improve to the identification and treatment protocols for drug overdose survivors who sustain a brain injury. The task force met monthly for 6 months and developed a plan focused on 3 target audiences:

- 1) Those on the front lines of the opioid epidemic (first responders, ER physicians & substance misuse counselors)
- 2) Families and caregivers
- 3) Teens

### **Phase II: Implementation, Sept. 2019 – Present**

The task force had been meeting once a month and recently changed to quarterly meetings to allow the subcommittees time to complete tasks.

Regional Expansion Plans: Steve Wade, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of NH, has worked with contacts in Maine and Vermont to establish a similar interagency task force and would like to expand the effort to include multiple states in a Northern New England Collaborative. Steve and other members of the task force are pursuing funding sources available through the state and private foundations.

Capacity Building: The SUD/Brain Injury and Mental Health task force has been featuring guest speakers at meetings and pursuing opportunities to partner on education and training initiatives. Building these relationships is an important step in targeting a statewide response to Opioid and SUD related Brain Injury. Guest speakers have included: Dr. John Corrigan, Ohio Valley Center for Brain Injury Prevention and

Rehabilitation; Ryan Fowler, NH Harm Reduction Coordinator for Claremont Exchange Syringe Program; Paula Holigan, NH Fire Academy & EMS; Cliff Lazenby, Portsmouth's Coordinated Response to the Substance Use Crisis (Phone Access Program); John Iudice, Addiction Recovery Services (Portsmouth, NH); Marcy Doyle and Marguerite Corvini, UNH Project ECHO and Phil Vaughn and Schuyler Scribner of NH PBS.

Networking: Phil Girard and Lindy Keller meet monthly with the Governors Healthcare Taskforce to ensure that BI is considered in SUD planning which happens at the state level. Information sharing between our two groups ensures that efforts are not duplicated, and messaging can be centralized.

Resource Directory: Hundreds of resources have been gathered to guide the work of the task force. This information, including weblinks and research on TBI / SUD has been compiled and distilled for future reference. The Task Force has extended this work to include information related to Brain Injury and SUD within the context of the Covid19 Pandemic. This information will be included as the directory is updated.

Projects in Progress:

- Opioid Overdose Rack Card: 700 of these have been distributed with opioid overdose kits through Paula Holigan, Program Manager, NH Fire Academy and EMS. Maria Reyes at Seacoast Public Health Network is in the process of distributing these through Lamprey Health Centers in Newmarket, Raymond and Nashua and has provided several contacts to pursue at the Doorways, recovery centers and the Recovery Friendly Workplace. We are pursuing funding to make more of these cards available for distribution and they will also be available electronically on the BIANH website.
- Review of Screening Tools: A subcommittee of the SUD/Brain Injury & Mental Health task force has reviewed current screening tools and is working to connect with ER physicians and PCPs on how to ask the right questions and identify the red flags that indicate a brain injury. The next step is to work with both the hospitals that have EPIC systems to record this data and the treatment and recovery centers who are most likely to conduct a full evaluation for a brain injury. A description of the screening tools and how they can be used by providers will be available on the BIANH website.

- Short Version of Roads to Recovery: We have worked with NH PBS so they could produce a shortened version of their Roads to Recovery documentary with the hope of getting it to the teen audiences via schools and athletic organizations. We have been talking with Lisa Hayward at the Office of Social and Emotional Wellness and Larry Averill, Education & Training Director for Life of an Athlete, NH Interscholastic Athletic Association about possibilities for use in classrooms and at conferences with student leaders.
- Speakers Bureau: We recently applied to speak at the NH Providers Association conference in July and are looking for other speaking engagement opportunities when conferences become available again. In November 2019, we put together a poster for presentation at the NE Rural Health conference. In 2020, the SUD/BI and Mental Health task force members gave presentations at both the NH Providers Association and the Seacoast Public Health Advisory Council. As a result of the presentation to the NH Providers Association, a campaign to raise awareness about the connection between brain injury and opioid overdose was developed.

**Long-Term 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.

**SUD/Brain Injury & Mental Health Interagency Task Force Members For 2020-2021**

Co-Chairs:

Robin Schell, APR, Fellow PRSA, Senior Counsel, Jackson Jackson & Wagner 603/770-3607

Phil Girard, Sr. Administrative Director, Brigham & Women's Hospital 603/553-5006

Steve Wade, Executive Director, Brain Injury Association of NH 603/225-8400

Erin Hall, MS, CBIST, Senior Director of Programs & Services, Brain Injury Association of NH

Krystal Sieradzki, MSW, CBIS, Director of Programs and Services

Larry Averill, NH Interscholastic Athletic Association

John Capuco, retired neuropsychologist (Formerly with NH Bureau of Developmental Services)

\*Amy Cook, Administrator, Div. of Community-Based Military Programs, NH Dept. of Military Affairs and Veterans Services\*

Tiffany Crowell, Nurse Administrator, NH Bureau of Developmental Services

\*Emily Edgerly, Substance Use Counselor

Ryan Fowler, NH Harm Reduction Coordinator, City of Claremont

Lisa Hayward, PhD, Prevention Coordinator, Office of Social & Emotional Wellness, NH DOE

Paula Holigan, Program Manager, SAMHSA, NH Fire Academy & Emergency Medical Services

Erica Hume, Sr. Case Manager, Community Partner

Lindy Keller, Bureau of Drug & Alcohol Services, NH DHHS

Susan McKeown, Author/Speaker and Certified Prevention Specialist

Katie Sawyer, Dir. of Medicaid Waiver, Co-Occurring Disorder Project, IDN4 Network4Health

Ann Turner, Clinical Director, Integrated Healthcare, IDN4 Network4Health

Dr. Deepak Vatti, ER Doctor, St. Joseph's Hospital, Nashua

\*=former task force member