

Press Release: Lake County Opioid Initiative (LCOI) Celebrates 11 Years of Impact and Announces New Executive Board

Lake County, IL – The Lake County Opioid Initiative (LCOI) was founded in 2014 in response to the growing crisis of opioid overdoses in our community, which were claiming an alarming number of lives through both fatal and near-fatal incidents. In its 11 years of service, LCOI has become a vital collaborative force in the fight against the opioid epidemic, uniting key stakeholders to work together rather than in isolation. Today, the LCOI celebrates the success of its programs, looks forward to continuing its mission, and introduces its newly appointed Executive Board.

“In Lake County, we have seen a small decline in overdose fatalities from 2023 to 2024; it is one sign that we’re on the right track, but this is no time to take our foot off the gas,” said Lake County Coroner Jennifer Banek, newly elected Chair of the Executive Board. “The opioid epidemic continues to ravage our communities, with our Black and Brown communities often bearing the brunt of the heartache. I look forward to leading the Lake County Opioid Initiative as we build on our successes to keep our communities safer.”

LCOI's comprehensive approach has seen significant success in multiple areas of opioid crisis intervention and prevention. One of its most celebrated initiatives is the partnership with the Lake County Underage Drinking and Drug Prevention Task Force’s award-winning prescription drug disposal network. This program, which began as a small initiative, now manages the safe disposal of nearly 18,000 pounds of unwanted pharmaceuticals each year at 33 participating police stations across Lake County. The model has been so successful that it has been used by the DEA to shape similar programs nationwide, helping to remove dangerous medications from homes and the community, preventing misuse and potential overdose.

In addition to prescription drug disposal, LCOI, in collaboration with the Lake County Health Department and all local police departments, has distributed Naloxone (commonly known as Narcan) to every police officer in Lake County. This life-saving medication counters opioid overdoses and enables first responders to reverse the effects of an overdose on the spot. Since the program's launch in December 2014, over 350 lives have been saved in our community. These interventions have been critical in reducing the number of opioid-related fatalities.

Moreover, LCOI was instrumental in launching the innovative “A Way Out” program in Lake County, which provides Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) to those seeking substance abuse treatment. The program allows individuals to seek help without the fear of facing criminal charges for possession of narcotics or paraphernalia, creating a pathway to treatment instead of incarceration. This program is available 24/7 at participating police departments, making access to help more immediate and accessible for those in need.

As LCOI celebrates its continued success, we are excited to announce the appointment of new members to the Executive Board, who will help guide the organization into its next chapter of fighting the opioid epidemic. The new Executive Board members are:

- **Chair:** Jennifer Banek, Lake County Coroner

- **Vice Chair:** Dr. Michael Karner, EdD, Lake County Regional Superintendent of Education
- **Secretary:** Eric Rinehart, Lake County State's Attorney
- **Treasurer:** Dr. Adam Rubenstein, MD

With these new leaders at the helm, LCOI remains committed to its mission of tackling the opioid crisis and providing effective, collaborative solutions to help those in need.

As we look ahead, we are eager to continue fostering partnerships that break down barriers and build a more resilient network of care for individuals struggling with addiction. LCOI's work is far from over, but with continued support from our partners, community, and new leadership, we are confident that we will continue to make a significant impact on the opioid crisis in Lake County and beyond.

For more information about the Lake County Opioid Initiative, or to get involved, please visit our website at <https://opioidinitiative.org/home>.

About the Lake County Opioid Initiative (LCOI):

The Lake County Opioid Initiative (LCOI) was founded in 2014 to address the opioid epidemic in Lake County, Illinois. By bringing together key stakeholders, LCOI aims to reduce opioid misuse, provide immediate overdose interventions, and offer accessible pathways to treatment for individuals struggling with substance use disorders. Through its collaborative efforts, LCOI continues to make strides in saving lives and shaping public health strategies in the community.