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New Toolkit to Help Ohio Communities Fight Heroin, Prescription Drug Epidemic

Resource encourages local collaboration to help stem the tide of opiate addiction

TOLEDO – Communities across Ohio will get a boost in the fight against heroin and other opiate addiction with today’s release of a “Health Resource Toolkit for Addressing Opioid Abuse.” State policymakers unveiled the new resource during a press conference at the Lucas County Corrections Center where Toledo-area officials were praised for their efforts to replicate the collaborative approach that exists in state government to implement effective responses to opioid abuse and addiction.

“Communities are looking for help; they are looking for answers. The Opiate Toolkit is geared towards meeting those needs,” said Andrea Boxill, deputy director of the Governor’s Cabinet Opiate Action Team (GCOAT), the chief architect behind the toolkit. “This is an inter-system and community collaboration that provides resources that stretch beyond government entities. The toolkit is designed to have citizens progressively identify their needs, problem solve to address those needs, and to maximize existing resources while developing new resources and partnerships.”

The toolkit provides guidance on everything from building a local coalition to prevent overdose deaths and promote responsible prescribing practices to expanding access to Medication-Assisted Treatment and embracing specialized docket programs to close the revolving door of addiction and crime. The resource includes technical support contacts at the state level, guidance on accessing relevant data and trend information as well as a checklist for building an effective local response. Two community case studies – highlighting innovative strategies and tactics deployed in Lucas and Summit counties – are also included.

“Whether a community is just becoming aware of the problem, already collaborating to tackle the issues or evaluating progress made thus far, this toolkit is meant to be a supplement to existing local efforts,” said Tracy Plouck, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS). “There is no one-size-fits-all approach to thwarting this epidemic, but this toolkit provides communities a blueprint from which they can create tailor-made solutions based on localized needs.”

Unintentional drug overdoses caused 2,110 deaths of Ohio residents in 2013. Opiates, which include heroin and prescription painkillers, were culpable in more than 70 percent of overdose deaths, according to Ohio Department of Health statistics. Heroin-related deaths rose from 697 in 2012 to 983 in 2013.

The toolkit will be available for download from the GCOAT website at: mha.ohio.gov/GCOAT.