

September 14, 2018



TO: Elected officials of the Lakes Region and Greater Portland

FROM: Kristina Egan, GPCOG Executive Director

RE: *Action Steps to Address Opioid Misuse: A Toolkit for Cities and Towns*

Opioid misuse continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing Cumberland County and the State of Maine. In response, GPCOG is working with its member cities and towns to enhance coordination of regional efforts to reduce opioid misuse. Some of you may have attended a workshop at the Greater Portland and Lakes Region Annual Summit in 2017 to learn what communities are doing to reduce misuse. If you missed it, you can check it out here www.gpcog.org/opioid-misuse/.

We've updated the 2017 toolkit of resources for you. Please find attached *Action Steps to Address Opioid Misuse: A Toolkit for Cities and Towns*. It outlines steps that city and town leaders like you can take to address the causes and consequences of opioid use disorder. Numerous Cumberland County stakeholders – including health care organizations, law enforcement agencies, prevention programs, and community coalitions – already have efforts underway. These local resources can bring evidence-based approaches to your community and are detailed in the *Toolkit*.

We hope you find this *Toolkit* useful. And, if you have other resources or approaches that are working in your community, please reach out to tell me so we can share your success with others in the region.

ACTION STEPS TO ADDRESS OPIOID MISUSE

A TOOLKIT FOR CITIES AND TOWNS

Local governments can “provide leadership, guidance, and vision in supporting a science-based approach to addressing substance use-related health issues.”

-Surgeon General's Report, 2016



City, town, and school leaders have important roles to play in addressing opioid misuse. Here is a list of actions municipalities can take to help build stronger and more responsive communities:

1

Make sure your school district has the resources and policies needed to use alternatives to suspensions and expulsions.

Supportive in-school suspension, with a behavioral health assessment, especially for students caught misusing substances, is a far more effective way to prevent continued substance misuse than giving students unsupervised time away from school.

- 💡 Connect with your local substance use prevention provider for technical assistance: Every municipality has a local prevention provider who can support policy development. Some also offer professional development trainings for school and municipal staff. For a list of local providers, visit: youareprevention.org/local-prevention-partners
- 💡 Engage the Day One program to assess which students need help: Day One provides early intervention for students using or at great risk of using substances. Providing treatment directly in the school when a problem arises has been the most effective way to address youth substance use. Day One's services are provided for students regardless of their ability to pay. For more information, contact Don Burke at 874-1045 x 114.
- 💡 Refer young people caught using drugs and alcohol for the first time to education programs: The Student Intervention and Reintegration Program (SIRP) is a 12-hour education program that can be used instead of more punitive consequences. To find a SIRP class near you, visit: sirp.adcareme.org

Advocate for more treatment options.

- 💡 You can advocate by asking local physicians to provide medications for addiction treatment (such as Suboxone) to patients in your community and by asking your state representative and senator to allocate additional resources to cover the cost of treatment for the uninsured.

2

Support the efforts of your local law enforcement – who already play a critical role in addressing opioid misuse.

3

- 💡 Make sure law enforcement officers receive ongoing training on administering Narcan and understanding the root causes of addiction: For more information about available training, connect with your local prevention provider. Visit youareprevention.org/local-prevention-partners
- 💡 Ask your local law enforcement agency to pick up unused medication. Most departments already host medication take-back days or have drop boxes. Adding pick-ups at residential programs, local senior housing developments, or during routine police calls can close gaps in your community.
- 💡 Find out what else your law enforcement agency needs to address the impact of addiction in your community: For instance, some police departments have added a behavioral health liaison or created a supported prison release program.

4

Share resources with community leaders to help reduce stigma against people who misuse opioids.

Professionals agree that the stigma associated with substance use disorders is having a negative impact on our ability to combat the problem. By changing the way we talk about the problem - from a character flaw to a disorder that can be treated - people are more likely to access help, parents are more likely to talk with their children, and local and state leaders are more likely to seek solutions to the problem. Simply switching the words "addict" or "drug abuser" to "a person with a substance use disorder" can help reduce stigma. You can help reduce stigma by reading and sharing these two resources with elected officials, community leaders, and local business owners:

- 💡 **Why does the language we use around the problem of addiction matter:**
www.psychologytoday.com/blog/addiction-recovery-101/201706/does-it-really-matter-how-we-talk-about-addiction-0
- 💡 **The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health: Facing Addiction in America**
addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/surgeon-generals-report.pdf

About this effort

The Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) is working with its member cities and towns to address opioid misuse. This work was identified as a 2017 priority of the Metro Regional Coalition (MRC) – which is composed of leaders from Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, Gorham, Portland, Scarborough, South Portland, and Westbrook. GPCOG and the MRC worked together in 2017 to enhance coordination of countywide efforts to reduce opioid misuse through peer learning, a community scan and, a forum at the Greater Portland and Lakes Region Annual Summit. In 2018 and 2019, GPCOG and MRC are engaging municipal leaders to reduce stigma and drive policy change.



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