Overview of Drug Related Deaths in Cuyahoga County

- The leading cause of injury-related death in Ohio continues to be accidental drug overdose.

- Opioid pain relievers, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, fentanyl, and hydromorphone are responsible for about 75% of all prescription drug overdose deaths.

- Deaths involving opioids have more than quadrupled since 1999, surpassing deaths from suicides, homicides, and falls.

- The rise in prescription drug related deaths closely parallels the increase in the prescribing of these drugs.

- Sales of opioid pain relievers in the United States more than quadrupled from 1999-2014.

- The substance abuse treatment admission rate for opioid abuse in 2014 was nearly ten times higher than in 1999.

- Interestingly, even though a vast increase in these medications have made their way into our communities there has not been an overall change in the amount of pain reported by Americans.

- In addition to prescription opioids, heroin use has increased nationwide among men, women of most age groups and all income levels. The most dramatic growth has occurred in groups with historically lower rates of heroin use, such as women and people with private insurance and higher incomes.

- Not only are people using heroin, they are also abusing multiple other substances simultaneously, such as alcohol, cocaine, and prescription medications.

- As heroin use increases, more people are dying. According to Dr. Thomas Gilson, Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner, 198 heroin-related overdose deaths occurred in Cuyahoga County in 2014 while fentanyl-related deaths increased from five in 2013 to 39 in 2014, a 640 percent increase.

- Fentanyl is a powerful opiate that is 30-50 times more potent than heroin. It is typically used during anesthesia or to treat patients with severe pain. However, recent overdoses have been connected to illegally produced and trafficked fentanyl, not diverted pharmaceutical grade fentanyl.
Definitions:

**Opiate**—originate from naturally-occurring elements found in the opium poppy plant. These drugs are best known for their ability to relieve pain symptoms. Opiate drug types include heroin, opium, morphine and codeine.

**Opioid**—any chemical that resembles morphine. They can be naturally occurring or man-made. Examples include oxycodone (OxyContin), fentanyl, methadone, hydrocodone (Vicodin).

Addiction as a Disease

Throughout much of the last century, scientists studying drug abuse operated under misconceptions about the nature of addiction. When the study of addictive behaviors began, individuals addicted to drugs were thought to be morally flawed and lacking willpower. These beliefs shaped societies response to drug abuse, treating it as a moral failing rather than a health problem. This led to an emphasis on punitive rather than preventative and treatment based responses.

Even now, discussion of substance use disorders is too often relegated to the shadows, steeped in STIGMA and misunderstanding.

Today, thanks to significant advances in neuroscience, our responses to drug abuse can begin to change. Groundbreaking discoveries about the brain have revolutionized our understanding of drug addiction, enabling us to respond more effectively to the problem.

Science demonstrates that addiction is a disease of the brain—a disease that can be prevented and treated, and from which people can recover.

While the initial decision to take drugs is mostly voluntary, when drug abuse takes over, a person’s ability to exert self-control can become seriously impaired. Brain imaging studies from drug-addicted individuals show physical changes in areas of the brain that are critical to judgment, decision making, learning and memory, and behavior control. Scientists believe that these changes alter the way the brain works, and may help explain the compulsive and destruction behaviors of addiction.

Addiction is not unlike other diseases, such as heart disease. Both disrupt the normal, health functioning of the underlying organ, have serious harmful consequences, and are preventable and treatable. If left untreated, each can become chronic and deadly. Relapse rates for drug addicted patients are similar to other chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. When treatment plans are not followed or do not work, the patient will relapse. Thus, drug addiction should be viewed and treated like any other chronic illness.

2013 & 2014

Cuyahoga County lost 340 residents to opioids in 2013 with an increase to 352 deaths in 2014.

2015

Number of deaths from heroin and prescription drugs decreases, but deaths from fentanyl are on the rise.
VISION:
To create a healthier community by reducing accidental fatalities associated with opiate abuse through collaborative partnerships that focus on prevention, treatment, and recovery.

MISSION:
To serve the residents of Cuyahoga County by actively working to raise public awareness, promote community action, and provide education related to the dangers and devastating effects of drug abuse.

Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force
Cuyahoga County was recognized in 2010 as one of the top five areas in Ohio being impacted by prescription drug abuse. It was at this point that the Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH) was invited by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) to be part of an education and awareness campaign called *Prescription for Prevention: Stop the Epidemic*. During the campaign, the Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force (CCOTF) was officially formed. Since its inception, membership has grown and the accomplishments of the CCOTF have been numerous.

CCOTF is currently comprised of more than 120 individuals representing over 50 organizations. Dedicated professionals representing all facets of the opiate epidemic including concerned citizens, drug treatment and recovery, education, health care, individuals in recovery, law enforcement, medicine, mental health services, pharmacists, prevention specialists, and public health all collaborate at the local, state and national level to implement prevention strategies that will have a positive impact on reducing drug abuse and death. Under the leadership of the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, the task force and its subcommittees meet on a bimonthly basis.
Ohio
Department of
Health Injury Prevention
Grant

Thanks to an existing partnership with ODH and the successful collaboration with CCOTF, CCBH was selected as a recipient of the Center for Disease Control’s Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant. Funding will be available through 2018 and will cover project activities. These dollars reflect ODH’s commitment to meet the needs of Cuyahoga County residents through specific programming implemented at the local level.

The goal of this grant is to significantly reduce fatalities associated with prescription drug abuse through the development of comprehensive, multi-faceted, population-based programs and policies.

During year one of the grant, a coalition assessment was conducted with the membership to identify potential gaps and also select goals for the CCOTF. Two overarching goals were chosen:

• Reduce the stigma associated with addiction
• Implement harm reduction strategies to combat abuse and fatalities

In addition, a comprehensive community needs assessment was conducted and the results were used to guide the development of high impact, population-wide policy, systems and environmental change strategies. These strategies were implemented and carried out by the CCOTF and Sub-grantees.

Year one and two sub-grantees included:

The Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office

The Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office (CCMEO) is a public service agency responsible for the investigation of violent, suspicious, sudden and unexpected deaths. These include overdose deaths due to opiates and heroin. The CCMEO continued to lead the Poison Death Review Committee, reviewing all opioid-related fatalities in Cuyahoga County. The data generated from the Poison Death Review committee is used to monitor trends and target future education and prevention efforts.

A current target is fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid that re-emerged in 2015 as a drug threat in Ohio and Cuyahoga County. It is sought by users because of the extreme high it produces. Fentanyl abuse is directly tied to the use of illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine as well as prescription opioids.

continued
CCMEO conducted an analysis of local fentanyl-related overdose deaths that clearly indicated a connection to heroin. Of the 39 decedents in 2014, 56% showed the presence of heroin in the cause of death.

The widely-reported trend of prescription opioid abusers transitioning to heroin with deadly consequences is greatly increased by the introduction of fentanyl into the cycle of abuse. Its impact will continue, with the number of decedents from fentanyl-related overdoses potentially tripling by the end of 2015.

At the request of the Ohio Department of Health, representatives from the Centers for Disease Control visited three major cities in Ohio in October 2015. They spent an entire day at CCBH interviewing key stakeholders to get a firm grasp on fentanyl trends. The purpose of this investigation was to determine the demographics of fentanyl abusers and establish proper prevention tools. A comprehensive report of their findings will be available early in 2016.

### Baldwin Wallace University

Baldwin Wallace University (BWU) in Berea, Ohio is a four-year liberal arts college with enrollment of approximately 4,000 students. As a second-year sub-grantee, BWU conducted a survey among students and faculty to assess the misuse of prescription drugs on campus. At this time, the survey is still being completed and the results have not been analyzed.

Targeted education continued to be delivered to both students and faculty to raise awareness about the misconceptions surrounding the opiate epidemic. BWU, in collaboration with CCBH, hosted a one-day regional collegiate prevention and recovery conference on November 30, 2015 involving multiple Northeast Ohio universities. By using survey and education tools, attending regional conferences and sharing experiences, the intent is that local campuses will be better equipped to create and/or strengthen existing policies that would reduce prescription drug abuse or overdose at their schools.

In addition, a partnership with Oakview Behavioral Health Center at Southwest General Hospital has been expanded. An Oakview representative has become an active member of the CCOTF and is working with BWU to develop prevention messaging for college students.
The MetroHealth System

The MetroHealth System created a policy and systems change by adopting and implementing the Ohio State Medical Association’s SmartRx Education Module. This module went live April 1, 2015 and served to better inform providers about the clinical, legislative, regulatory, and patient education components surrounding the opiate abuse crisis in Ohio. The SmartRx online training modules offer an interactive and engaging delivery method which provides busy physicians the up-to-date information they need when they need it.

Based on data gathered from the CCMEO’s PDR Committee and current Project DAWN sites, several new naloxone education and distribution sites have been established. Cuyahoga County now has a total of eight permanent distribution locations along with various community distribution events. Since its inception in 2013, Project DAWN has disseminated approximately 3,000 kits and documented nearly 300 lives saved. Dr. Joan Papp was instrumental in advocating for the passage of HB 4 which will greatly increase access to naloxone in Cuyahoga County for 2016. Please see page 9 for more detailed information about Cuyahoga County Project DAWN.

MetroHealth, in collaboration with CCBH and the Academy of Medicine Northern Ohio, hosted a one-day conference about the stigma associated with addiction called Opioid Use Disorder, the Associated Stigma, and How to Use Key Prevention Tools. Nearly 200 individuals, primarily physicians, social workers, and nurses, attended the event. MetroHealth had over 23 different departments represented at the conference and approximately 52 different organizations were present overall. Sam Quinones, author of the book Dreamland, provided the keynote address. Through conference evaluations, 93% of attendees stated the conference achieved its goals and 95% reported they found the speakers to be excellent.
First year sub-grantee, Dr. Melanie Golembiewski, MD, Preventive Medicine Resident at University Hospitals Case Medical Center, has coordinated a field component to supplement the substance abuse prevention and treatment curriculum for medical residents in both the Family Medicine Residency Program and the Preventive Medicine Residency Program at University Hospitals Case Medical Center. Both programs focus on training the next generation of leaders while also reflecting the national call to bridge the gap between public health and clinical medicine using a broader socioecological perspective.

By developing an interactive and community-based experiential curriculum, family medicine resident physicians realized the following benefits:

- increased awareness of the association between prescribed opioids and overdose related morbidity and mortality
- greater understanding of the biology of substance addiction
- improved self-efficacy in identifying opioid risk behaviors, counseling patients on opioid use, and referring patients to local resources when necessary
- enhanced appreciation for the ways in which medicine and public health can align in order to curtail the epidemic of opioid related deaths

In terms of evaluation, 87.5% of students indicated on their post-test that they were “confident in their ability to screen patients for drug abuse and addiction” versus just 25% for the pre-test.

Core curriculum rotation for second-year residents was dedicated to visiting and interacting with treatment/recovery centers, detox facilities, substance abuse support meetings, and the U.S Department of Justice. Dr. Golembiewski coordinated all the of the field activities with local collaborative partners creating an educational model that can be replicated in other residency training programs across the state.
Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) is an opioid overdose education and naloxone distribution (OEND) program. Its purpose is to save lives by providing Naloxone to individuals and families of those who are at-risk for opioid overdose. Program participants learn about the risk factors for opioid overdose, how to respond to an opioid overdose by calling 911, giving rescue breaths, and administering nasal Naloxone. They are given free Naloxone kits containing two vials of Naloxone Hydrochloride medication.

Those eligible to participate are individuals at-risk for opioid overdose, whether in recovery for opioid use disorder or actively using opioids, and individuals who may be in a future position to assist someone who is at-risk of opioid overdose.

Ohio’s first Project DAWN began in 2012 as a pilot program initiated by the Ohio Department of Health in Scioto County. Cuyahoga County’s Project DAWN was launched on March 1, 2013 and has since documented nearly 300 overdose rescues.

Project DAWN is funded by the MetroHealth System, the Ohio Department of Health, the Cuyahoga County Executive’s Office, and the Alcohol Drug and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County.

Cuyahoga County MetroHealth Project DAWN operates three free community walk-in clinics that are accessible to individuals regardless of what county they live in.

**Community Walk-In Clinics**

**Thomas F. McCafferty Health Center**  
4242 Lorain Ave., Cleveland, OH  
Walk-in hours: Thursdays, 4pm-8pm

**The Cuyahoga County Board of Health**  
5550 Venture Dr., Parma, OH  
Walk-in hours: Fridays, 9am-12pm

**The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland**  
12201 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH  
Walk-in hours: Fridays, 1pm-5pm
Legislative Updates

Advocating for practical legislation at the local, state, and national level is an important component in developing harm reduction strategies that will reduce drug overdose deaths. 2015 brought about several important legislative successes.

HB4 was signed into law by Ohio Governor Kasich and took effect mid-year 2015. It will greatly expand access to Naloxone using these methods:

- Physicians are permitted to authorize one or more individuals to personally furnish a supply of naloxone pursuant to a protocol.
- A pharmacist or pharmacy intern is authorized, under the direct supervision of a pharmacist, to dispense naloxone without a prescription in accordance with a physician-approved protocol.
- A local board of health is permitted, through a physician serving as the board’s health commissioner or medical director, to authorize the protocol for pharmacists and pharmacy interns working in that board of health’s jurisdiction.

Needle Exchange-Those who inject drugs are at increased risk for HIV, Hepatitis C, and various infections. Syringe exchange programs can help an individual injecting drug reduce the risk of causing themselves additional harm or spreading infectious diseases. The program can also serve as a resource for drug treatment programs.

Syringe exchange can benefit a community in many ways. These programs help reduce the sharing of needles and other supplies that can spread diseases. Screenings for communicable diseases can increase and early treatment can result in improved outcomes for the patient and reduce medical costs for the community.

Research shows that Syringe Services Programs

- Help link addicts to drug treatment programs and HIV prevention services
- Help prevent the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other diseases
- Reduce the number of improperly discarded syringes
- Do not lead to increased drug use
- Do not lead to increased crime

There are currently five syringe exchange programs operating in Ohio, including one in Cuyahoga County. The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland syringe exchange program focuses on reducing the incidence of HIV infection in high risk populations by providing injection drug users with clean supplies and education to slow the spread of blood-borne disease. All needles are exchanged on a one-for-one basis so clients must have a used needle in order to receive one.

- Hours: 9 a.m.- noon at HUMADOP at 3305 West 25th Street
- Hours: 1-3 p.m. at East 83rd and Cedar Avenue

Syringes can also be exchanged on site at The Free Clinic, 12201 Euclid Ave., Cleveland Monday through Thursday 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. / Fridays 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
HB 249-Ohio’s 911 Good Samaritan Bill.

The chance of surviving a drug overdose depends on how fast the victim receives medical attention. Drug overdoses can occur over a period of 1-3 hours, meaning there is time to intervene and save a life. Unfortunately, overdose witnesses often hesitate to summon emergency responders for fear of arrest or negative consequences, which can result in the loss of a life.

911 Good Samaritan laws encourage bystanders to seek medical attention while also providing limited immunity for others at the scene from arrest and prosecution for simple drug possession, possession of paraphernalia, and/or being under the influence. However, these policies do not provide immunity for offenses such as trafficking drugs or driving while under the influence. This bill has not yet been passed, but several members of the CCOTF are actively advocating for its passage. This legislation represents a proven public health initiative that can save lives.

CCOTF Collaborative Initiatives

Second Annual We Are the Majority Youth Rally

Over 200 high school youth and youth leaders from across Northeast Ohio came together on April 30, 2015 to participate in the second annual *We Are the Majority Youth Rally*. The students gathered at the Global Center for Health Innovation, participated in numerous team-building activities, and then attended a rally at Cleveland City Hall. The main purpose of this rally was to raise awareness of the fact that the majority of youth make healthy choices and do not partake in drug and alcohol abuse. The third annual rally is being planned for 2016.

Promotional Video for the Rally can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6e83ZAmvRgE

MetroHealth County Wide Baby Shower

Babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome experience withdrawal symptoms, respiratory complications, low birth weight, feeding difficulties and seizures. They can spend days or weeks in the NICU. The number of babies treated for neonatal abstinence syndrome at MetroHealth’s NICU has gone up every year — 58 in 2012 to over 100 in 2014.

Up to 125 women and babies at MetroHealth will be enrolled in MetroHealth’s *Maternal Opiate Medical Support (M.O.M.S.)* program, one of four

continued
active programs in Ohio designed to reduce the number and length of hospital stays for women who are being treated for heroin and other opiate addiction and dependency, and for their babies being treated for neonatal abstinence syndrome. Launched with grant money through the Governor’s Office of Health Transformation’s Innovation Fund, program partners include Ohio Medicaid and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

MetroHealth provides every mom and her newborn with vital medical care and other services they need to overcome their addiction. But babies need more than a substance-free start. As a way to provide the basic necessities to the mothers and their babies, MetroHealth organized a county wide baby shower.

Ten women from across the county hosted baby showers on May 2 and 3, 2015, collecting essential items such as diapers, wipes, bath soap, sleepers, etc. Allisyn Leppla, a member of the CCOTF hosted one of the showers at the Cuyahoga County Board of Health. Through generous donations from several members of the CCOTF and Marc’s Pharmacy, over $5,000 worth of necessary items were able to be donated to this program.

The following video highlights the stories of two moms who have successfully completed the program. [https://vimeo.com/128624772](https://vimeo.com/128624772)

**Shatterproof Challenge**

*Shatterproof* is a national organization committed to protecting loved ones from addiction to illicit and prescription drugs, and alcohol, and ending the stigma and suffering of those affected by this disease. The Shatterproof Challenge was a unique and extreme way to raise awareness about this illness and shatter the stigma that surrounds it.

Three members of the CCOTF: Allisyn Leppla, Dr. Chris Delos Reyes, and Chris Peshek, accepted the Shatterproof Challenge on August 6, 2015 and rappelled down 23 stories of the Sheraton Hotel in Columbus, Ohio. Each participant was required to raise a minimum of $1,000. Approximately 60 participants accepted the Shatterproof Challenge in Columbus, with various other locations occurring across the nation.
**Unite to Face Addiction**

*Facing Addiction* is a new, national non-profit group that was organized at the “UNITE to Face Addiction” rally, a free event that took place on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. on October 4, 2015.

Over 30,000 individuals gathered to let our nation know that addiction is preventable and treatable, that far too many of those affected have been incarcerated, and that people can and do recover.

The rally featured powerful remarks from celebrities, public officials and advocates including U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, Director of the National Drug Control Policy at the White House, Michael Bottecelli, Dr. Mehmet Oz, Darryl Strawberry, Patrick Kennedy, Chris Herren, and others. Musical guests included Joe Walsh, Steven Tyler, Sheryl Crow, The Fray, and the Goo Goo Dolls.

On Monday, October 5, more than 600 citizen advocates, including CCOTF partners, had an opportunity to meet with their members of Congress as part of Advocacy Day. The group called for a public health response to the addiction crisis, improvements in public safety, and the protection of civil liberties for those recovering or seeking to recover from addiction who are also involved with the criminal justice system.

**Other Advocacy Day activities included:**

- Thanking the Members of Congress who co-sponsored The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), including Ohio Senator Rob Portman.
- Asking other Members to add their names as co-sponsors of this bipartisan piece of legislation.
- Requesting signatures for a letter to be sent to federal agencies demonstrating support for full implementation and enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.
- Gathering support for the REDEEM Act.

**Let’s Face It: Know the Signs**

*Let’s Face It* is a public service of the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor’s Office offers resources and education about overdose and withdrawal, and statistics to aid in the prevention and intervention of heroin and opiate addiction. An impactful element of the education includes firsthand accounts about the effects of addiction.

A new initiative for 2015 was the creation of a video called *Signs of Heroin Use*. It shows that the signs of addiction are all around us. Knowing them is important to those who may need to intervene. The video does not intend to create paranoia or false alarm. It is about providing information and insight that will help individuals help the ones they care about.

Please visit the *Let’s Face It* website to learn more about the heroin epidemic in Northeast Ohio and to view the Signs of Heroin Use video at [http://www.letsfaceheroin.com/signs.html](http://www.letsfaceheroin.com/signs.html).
Future Initiatives

We are optimistic about seeing a reduction in drug overdose fatalities in 2016. Understanding that collaboration is critical to the success of the CCOTF, we look forward to working with an ever-increasing range of individuals and organizations in Cuyahoga County that are dedicated to seeing positive changes for those suffering with addiction.

We are looking forward to expanding partnerships outside of Cuyahoga County as well. As part of the ODH Injury Prevention Grant, a partnership with both the Mahoning and Trumbull County Boards of Health will be established in 2016 to assist them in their efforts to build capacity and address drug overdose in their counties.

Success Story-Law Enforcement Saves Lives by Carrying Naloxone

As opiate overdoses have soared in Cuyahoga County and across the nation, more police departments are taking a hard look at equipping their police officers with naloxone instead of waiting for paramedics to arrive. Police are often the first to arrive at the scene, and experts know those early minutes can be the key to saving a life.

Naloxone is viewed as an essential tool to combat the increasing number of overdoses. The medication, which can be administered in the form of a nasal spray or shot, is simple to use. It can quickly restore breathing to an overdose victim and send a person into immediate withdrawal, does not produce a high, and has no street value if diverted to the black market.

The law allowing officers to carry and administer Naloxone, HB 170, was signed in March 2014 by Governor John Kasich. However, some law enforcement agencies, for a variety of reasons, have decided against carrying the lifesaving medication. Fortunately, in Cuyahoga County, law enforcement agencies have been rather quick to jump on board. Currently there are more than 20 departments across the county that are equipped with Naloxone. Most departments began carrying the antidote in the fall of 2014. Since this time there have been approximately 35 lives saved, although this number is most likely higher due to under reporting.

The Westshore Enforcement Bureau (WEB), which covers six communities on the west side of Cuyahoga County, (Bay Village, Fairview Park, Lakewood, North Olmsted, Rocky River, and Westlake) have reported nearly two-thirds of the saves. According to WEB Special Agent in Charge and member of the CCOTF, Jeff Capretto, most of the officers are happy to have the naloxone as they are often the first on the scene of an overdose and feel it is more of a liability to not carry the medication. The officers store the naloxone in their duty bags and do not store it in the car. Some departments issue the naloxone to officers during role call and others assign it directly to individual officers.

As the use of naloxone increases, so do the stories about police officers using it to reverse overdoses that likely would have been fatal. It is the hope that more and more law enforcement agencies will see the great benefit of saving lives with naloxone.

With money available from Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Cuyahoga County Board of Health will begin to distribute Naloxone kits to local law enforcement agencies at no charge in early 2016.
The Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force is committed to significantly reducing fatalities associated with opiate abuse. The CCOTF will continue to meet on a bimonthly basis in 2016 and all meetings are open to anyone wishing to attend.

For more information or to become a member, please visit:
www.opiatecollaborative.cuyahogacounty.us
Twitter.com/OpiateTaskForce
Facebook.com/CuyahogaCountyOpiateTaskForce

Questions?
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