

DAILY FREEMAN

Ulster Records 26 Opioid-Related Deaths So Far In 2023, Officials Say



TOWN OF ULSTER, N.Y.— Ulster County Department of Health officials said at a forum Tuesday that there were 26 opioid-related deaths and 195 opioid-related overdoses in the county in 2023 so far, adding that opioid use disorder was on the rise.

Ulster County Department of Health personnel received feedback and suggestions from care providers and residents hoping to curb the opioid crisis in their communities and shared new statistics and details about future funding during the Tuesday forum at the Samahdi Recovery Community Outreach Center.

Attendees said that they had seen empty needles in Kingston in places like Elmendorf Street.

Tara McDonald, the county commissioner of mental health, said a diverse mix of care such as harm reduction and more traditional resources will lead to a healthier community.

“There are a good amount of funds coming our way,” she said. “What we are hoping for are innovative programs, service and community-based interventions that can be sustained throughout time. Hopefully, at the end of those 18 years, we’ll be using money for playgrounds because we’ll find our way out of this horrible situation.”

Department of Health representatives said they had plans to use funds the county received from settlements with pharmaceutical companies on several projects and were hoping to field proposals from organizations.

Sahmadi Recovery Community Outreach Center and Ellenville Regional Hospital, [the county announced in March](#), are set to receive \$1.3 million for projects like a detox center.

Steve Greenfield, a New Paltz School Board member, said that a part of the problem with the way the opioid epidemic is being treated is that those trying to help don't understand the psyche of some people with opioid abuse disorder and don't recognize the level of buy-in necessary from communities and institutions in order to provide those in recovery with the support they need.

Patrick Hertica, a care provider at Sahmadhi said, "It's not like it has ever been before in the past. The risk-to-reward ratio for being an addict now is worse than it's ever been in human history. The amount of people who are dying is astronomical."

He added that he didn't know how much money it would take to find a purpose for people in order to prevent people from developing opioid use disorder and aid with their recovery.

Jillian Nadiak-Bruck, community engagement coordinator for the Ulster County Department of Mental Health said she invited care providers and community members to reach out to her with thoughts or questions at jnad@co.ulster.ny.us.