

OPIOID CRISIS CHALLENGES ALL PHILADELPHIANS IN 2017

The opioid use crisis is changing the landscape of every community in Philadelphia and in our neighboring suburban towns as well and fight for solutions can no longer be left to government and treatment agencies. According to the City's Department of Public Health, Philadelphia is projected to have 840 drug overdose deaths in 2016, an 80% increase from 2013 and nearly three times the number of homicides in the city. Eighty percent of those overdose deaths involved **opioids, including prescription painkillers, heroin, and fentanyl.**

In 2015 alone, of the nearly 600 persons dying of opioid overdose, males outnumbered females 3:1, deaths were two times higher among Caucasians than among African Americans with rates for those of Hispanic ethnicity rated as intermediate; and rates were highest among persons ages 25-59 years, though deaths of youths as young as 15 years were reported. ***In greater Northeast Philadelphia, 134 deaths were recorded – that's 22% of all opioid related deaths in Philadelphia in 2015!***

Additionally, in November, Philadelphia suffered **50 overdoses in one day.** The **35 people** who are thought to have died of drug overdoses in just five days in December ranged in age from 19 to 66, 69% of whom were male and 60% non-Hispanic whites according to the Philadelphia Department of Public Health.

In response to this crisis, Mayor Jim Kenney announced the formation of a Task Force to combat the opioid epidemic in Philadelphia. "The opioid epidemic has been taking lives, destroying families and undermining the quality of life of Philadelphians across the city," said Mayor Jim Kenney, "This is a significant social and public health challenge requiring a comprehensive, citywide approach."

The Mayor's Task Force to Combat the Opioid Epidemic convenes in mid-January to initiate the City's coordinated response. The task force will be co-chaired by two City Commissioners, Arthur C. Evans, Jr., Ph.D., Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services and Dr. Thomas Farley, Department of Public Health. It will be comprised of 16 members with representatives from a broad section of stakeholders who are affected by the epidemic including representatives from all relevant city departments and city council; addiction experts, researchers, physicians, business and community groups, persons with lived experience, state and federal government and law enforcement.

In addition to the Task Force meetings, the Task Force will hold four **Listening Sessions** in late January and early February chaired by the Commissioners and Task Force members and **CORA will be hosting one of these sessions** (date to be announced). While CORA actively provides substance use treatment services to those who request them and intervention services for those exposed to and affected by substance use, we can only play a part in tackling this crisis. You may be personally affected by this epidemic, or, if not, you likely know someone who is, or whose family is, or whose school is. The economic impact on our communities in terms of school and work time/productivity lost, enormous amounts of tax dollars directed to emergency, social and justice system responses, etc., and the emotional and psychological toll it takes on our children and families affect all citizens in some way.

The solution to this and many of the serious issues adversely affecting our families, schools, open spaces and communities lies with Philadelphians themselves and we invite you to be part of those solutions. Please take a moment to look at how this opioid crisis touches your lives, directly or indirectly, write down your thoughts, concerns and suggestions and consider attending the Opioid Task Force Listening Session to be hosted by CORA in early February to lend your voice to the solution.

CORA will follow this post with another in mid-January announcing the date and time of the Listening Session once it is confirmed by the City. We're looking forward to seeing you and listening to you.

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