

Dane Co. Exec. Parisi: Dane County, Safe Communities Coalition team to expand early intervention program for heroin, opiate overdose emergencies

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An innovative program that guides people into immediate treatment shortly after experiencing a medical emergency from a heroin overdose will expand to more hospitals in Dane County. The “recovery coach” project, a partnership between the Safe Communities Coalition, Dane County, the Wisconsin Medical Society, and local health care providers, debuted earlier this year at St. Mary’s Hospital. To date, 87% of the people recovery coaches intervened with at the hospital got into treatment shortly after their overdose. These positive results from ED2Recovery’s pilot program have led leaders to begin the process of expanding its efforts to more hospitals.

“Data shows early intervention and treatment is by far the most effective means of curtailing the terribly addictive characteristics of heroin and opiates,” County Executive Joe Parisi said. Parisi included \$15,000 in his 2017 Dane County budget to help Safe Communities fund the “recovery coach” program. “By teaming with the community and health care providers, we are getting people the help they need when the data says they are most likely to be open to getting it; unfortunately, that’s shortly after a close call.”

This collaborative, innovative effort at confronting the challenge heroin poses in the community has garnered national attention. Video producers for LinkedIn are in Madison this week to highlight the work recovery coaches are doing to connect overdose patients in emergency departments straight to treatment.

“Safe Communities is thrilled with the success of ED2Recovery and is grateful for our partners in Dane County and statewide that have supported recovery coach interventions,” said Skye Tikkanen, Drug Poisoning Prevention Manager at Safe Communities. “Those who are in recovery from addiction offer valuable experience and insight into this epidemic and have truly become part of the solution in Dane County. We are looking forward to the expansion of this program and to evaluate how this intervention impacts the opioid crisis.”

In addition to addressing heroin and opiate overdose emergencies, the partnership is launching a new program August 1st focused on supporting pregnant women who have an opioid use disorder. As part of Pregnancy2Recovery, recovery coaches will be connected with moms at SSM’s High Risk Pregnancy clinic. The coaches will connect these moms to appropriate treatment resources, self-help groups, and community services to help them better navigate the challenges that come with babies going through withdrawal after being born.

“SSM Health has been delighted to partner with Safe Communities to launch the ED2Recovery project and is pleased to host a second pilot to assist pregnant women with opioid use disorders in their recovery,” said Melissa Fisher, Director of Emergency Services at SSM Health-St. Mary’s Hospital.

Communities and hospitals across Wisconsin will soon be adopting the “recovery coach” model created in Dane County. Wisconsin Voices for Recovery at the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies is administering a grant to employ recovery coaches and certified peer support specialists with the ultimate goal of increasing treatment and recovery support service utilization, reducing emergency department recidivism, and decreasing the number of overdose fatalities throughout the state of Wisconsin. Safe Communities will apply for the funds to help manage the program in Dane County. The grant’s funds were made available following recommendations from the Governor’s Task Force on Opioid Abuse.