

Dane County Office Executive Parisi: To pursue legal action against pharmaceutical companies for Opioid Epidemic

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Today, County Executive Joe Parisi announced that Dane County will pursue legal action against pharmaceutical companies for their responsibility in triggering the nation's opioid epidemic. A resolution directing Dane County's Corporation Counsel to pursue whatever legal means necessary to most effectively hold accountable the pharmaceutical companies for the opioid epidemic will go before the County Board at tomorrow night's meeting.

"The opioid epidemic has hit local communities hard across the United States, and Dane County is no exception," said County Executive Joe Parisi. "It's time to tell pharmaceutical companies that enough is enough. This epidemic has strained our resources and has cost local communities across Wisconsin millions of dollars as we try to get people the treatment and recovery they so desperately need."

Prescription opioids have become exceedingly prevalent in the Dane County community. According to the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, more than 500,000 prescriptions for opioids have been dispensed to Dane County residents annually since 2013. On average, 21 million opioid pills are dispensed to Dane County residents per year. That equates to over 39 opioid pills being prescribed to each of Dane County's approximately 531,000 residents every 12 months.

In just one year, Dane County Emergency Medical Services has seen an over 30 percent spike in suspected overdose incidents. In 2016, there were 486 suspected overdose incidents that took place. That number has jumped to 643 suspected overdose incidents so far in 2017, putting added pressure on Emergency Medical Services units.

A total of 13 opioid involved deaths occurred in 2000, but that number skyrocketed to 85 in 2016. According to Public Health of Madison and Dane County, the rate of prescription opioid involved deaths in Dane County has doubled since 2000, from 6.3 per 100,000 people in 2000 to 12.4 per 100,000 people in 2016. The rate of heroin involved deaths has more than tripled since 2000, from 3.0 per 100,000 people in 2000 to 10.1 per 100,000 people in 2016.

Dane County is working hard to combat this growing epidemic. One program that is funded in part by the county and guides people into immediate treatment shortly after experiencing a medical emergency from a heroin overdose is the ED2Recovery Program. County Executive Parisi included \$15,000 in his 2017 Dane County budget to help Safe Communities fund this endeavor. The ED2Recovery Program empowers those in recovery, called recovery coaches, by having them support and guide those who have just survived an overdose through the process of seeking long-term treatment.

Overall, Dane County has allocated a significant amount of resources to help to those struggling with opioid addiction. Approximately \$7.5 million made up Dane County's 2017 Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment budget. There was \$733,000 in grant revenue from the state and federal governments that specifically provided treatment to those using opiates and using drugs intravenously in Dane County's 2017 budget. Of the Dane County residents receiving county-funded treatment, 30 percent were seeking treatment for problems with using opiates.