

Ald. Murphy: Preliminary report to be released by Heroin, Opioid and Cocaine Task Force

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Ald. Michael J. Murphy

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The preliminary report of the **City-County Heroin, Opioid and Cocaine Task Force** puts forth a proactive all-hands-on-deck plan that includes focusing on addiction and drug misuse prevention, increased access to services, and greater collaboration between community-based initiatives and government agencies, **Alderman Michael J. Murphy** said.

The preliminary report was released by the task force today and can be viewed by going to Alderman Murphy's city webpage at city.milwaukee.gov/district10. The report offers an initial set of policy recommendations to address the fatal and non-fatal overdose epidemic in Milwaukee and Milwaukee County involving heroin, opioids, synthetic analogs and cocaine (in both powder and crack form). "This report is a key launch point as we look for workable approaches to stem the deadly tide of overdoses and the terrible toll of addiction in our community," Alderman Murphy said. "The problem of addiction is highly complicated and involves illness and an over-arching public health issue, and the recommendations of the task force are grounded in a public health approach."

The recommended focus areas included in the preliminary report are (in no order of importance):

- Enhance and fund existing prevention programs to keep individuals from

developing substance use disorder.

- Reduce the number of opioid related deaths in Milwaukee County.
- Reduce the number of drug violation related arrests amongst youth.
- Ensure there is adequate access to timely, affordable, and quality services for those all people with substance use disorders.
- Develop programs in collaboration with the criminal justice system that treat addiction as a disease, while actively working to reduce the availability of illicit substances.
- Enhance collaboration between community-based initiatives and government agencies.
- Improve epidemiology and surveillance related to substance misuse.
- Support federal, state and local policies and legislation that reduces substance misuse and overdose with equitable, cost-effective and evidence-based approaches.

“This issue is personal for many of us, and it’s a huge priority for Milwaukee County,” said **Mike Lappen**, co-chair for the Task Force and administrator for the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division. “We want people who are invested in creating a recovery-minded community to bring their ideas to the table so we can connect individuals to sustainable solutions that save lives.”

Alderman Murphy, the primary sponsor of the Common Council legislation creating the task force, said **multiple public listening sessions** will be held across the community to gather input before a final plan is adopted by the task force. “We want to hear from citizens, stakeholders and anyone who has ideas and input to share. Those public sessions will be scheduled soon and we will make a public announcement to provide all of the details when ready,” he said.

“Whether it is a teenager ingesting cough syrup to get high, a young adult using cocaine, or a middle age person unnecessarily taking prescription drugs — substance abuse is not limited to one profile in the community,” said **Alderman Khalif J. Rainey**, a task force member. “For us to properly address this issue we will need community awareness and involvement.”

The task force has been working steadily during the past year to shape the policy recommendations. The body is composed of experts from the Common Council, Health Department, Police Department, Fire Department, Milwaukee County Circuit Court, Intergovernmental Relations, the County Executive’s leadership team,

healthcare or hospital systems, the Medical Society of Milwaukee County, medical professionals, community organizations and the general public.

The task force has been able to build on the city's partnership with the **Medical College of Wisconsin** and data analysis by Alderman Murphy's office. An early examination of overdose figures had showed the county was on pace to endure a record number of heroin and opiate overdose deaths in the year 2016.

The report's letter states: "This is the most significant public health crisis we have faced, and its scope and magnitude cannot be overstated. In 2017, drug overdoses ripped 401 sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, from their families in Milwaukee County, killing more people than shootings, suicides and driving related deaths combined."

The letter ends with this: "Most importantly, we want to stress there is hope. Addiction and this crisis can be overcome. While the yoke of addiction is heavy and the challenges we face are substantial, we can begin to alleviate the burdens created by substance abuse by harnessing Milwaukee's collective power and resiliency, engaging with compassion and urgency."