

Dane County Exec Parisi: County to deploy 100 overdose aid kits throughout community, launch comprehensive campaign to help reduce deaths

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Dane County and a number of community partners are teaming together on a series of new efforts aimed at reducing the number of people who die from drug poisoning, County Executive Joe Parisi announced today. Parisi held a news conference at Second Baptist Church in Madison to mark the launch of the county's OAK—Overdose Aid Kits—Program.

Dane County is working with Safe Communities Madison-Dane County to assemble and distribute 100 of these publicly available OAK boxes across the community. Each one will be stocked with doses of nasal naloxone (Narcan), fentanyl test strips, and resources for those seeking help with treatment and recovery. These boxes, developed by ServeRx, are being sited in areas that data shows have a higher prevalence of opioid-related deaths. In addition, three vending machines will be installed this summer with around the clock access to Narcan and other recovery resources at the Dane County Jail, Public Health Offices on East Washington Avenue, and at a third, yet to be determined location in downtown Madison.

“By getting more resources out into the community and making them easier to access we can hopefully reduce the number of families who lose loved ones to the tragedy of drug poisoning,” Parisi said. “The harms caused by overdoses are far reaching, so it’s important we come at this from as many approaches as it takes to stop people from needlessly dying,” Parisi said.

Dane County has worked with Safe Communities for years on a “Recovery Coach” program that links those who have experienced an overdose emergency or struggle with addiction to treatment resources in the community. These peer support coaches are on call and respond to area hospitals and work with those in jail to help reduce the chances they return to opioid use once released. Parisi also announced this morning that dollars from the county’s “Harm Reduction Initiative” will fund a pilot to embed these recovery coaches directly into the emergency room at Unity Point Health-Meriter Hospital beginning this July. Having recovery coaches on-hand at the hospital will improve collaboration between patients, peers, family members, and staff to reduce drug harm and improve patient outcomes.

In addition to responding to the harm caused by opioid overdose, Dane County, Safe Communities, and local schools are launching a pilot educational program in local high schools this fall aimed at prevention. The Madison Metropolitan School District will serve as a pilot site for the evidence-based curricula known as “Safety First” in their schools.

Additionally, a sweeping public education campaign will launch later this summer that’s intended to confront the opioid epidemic through a variety of messages for those who use, their families, and the public. This media and advertising launch will focus on the dangers of inadvertently ingesting fentanyl, the importance of carrying Narcan, and how to recognize and respond in the event of an overdose.

Dane County recently hired an “Opioid Specialist” in the Department of Emergency Management who will help further focus the county’s prevention efforts along with Public Health Madison-Dane County.

Funding for all of these efforts is provided through a combination of dollars Dane County received from its involvement in national opioid settlement litigation, along with county tax dollars.

“Working together, we can continue to reduce preventable deaths and the harm and sadness too many continue to experience as a result of overdoses,” Parisi concluded.