



The Cutting Edge

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN NJ

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

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MHANJ's

16th Annual Evening of Excellence Focuses on the Opiate Epidemic

This year, the Mental Health Association in New Jersey's (MHANJ's) Evening of Excellence highlighted an interactive forum featuring a panel of experts and an honored guest who discussed issues and solutions around the opiate addiction crisis in New Jersey.

The panel engaged in a lively and informative discussion on the progression of addiction as a disease, stigma related to addiction and the changing face of addiction. Below are some perspectives we would like to share.



"Addiction is a chronic disease, just like diabetes

New Jersey's Opiate Epidemic



prescription drugs.

It is well known that heroin and prescription opiate use in New Jersey has increased significantly in the last decade. Overdose deaths in the state have risen considerably as well, with two-thirds of those deaths involving

While New Jersey is not the only state in the nation getting swept up in the surge of heroin use, it does have the unwelcome distinction of being known to have some of the strongest, purest, and cheapest heroin available. Far cheaper than obtaining a \$25 Oxycodone pill illegally, an addict can get a bag of heroin for as little as \$5.



The Road to Addiction -- A Slippery Slope

Understanding the problem requires understanding the changing times, and looking at addiction from a new viewpoint entirely. Addiction does not discriminate based on socioeconomic status, race, gender or age. Those affected may include your neighbors, students, friends, acquaintances and loved ones.

In recent years, reports of opiate use among teens and young adults have become more common. Factors influencing this include coupling impressionable youth with easy access to substances known to bring euphoria and "numb the pain," right in the family's medicine cabinet. Social media, text messaging and dealers willing to provide delivery services make for an opiate epidemic of growing concern, proportion and danger.

is a chronic disease, and needs to be viewed and treated the same."

--Senator Joseph F. Vitale, Chairman, Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee, Vice Chairman, Senate Labor Committee, Member of Distinguished Panel of Honorees



"Primary care physicians are important players in avoiding and addressing opiate abuse. The doctor's office is the perfect setting to prevent the problem in the first place, and if it already exists, engage individuals in early treatment."

--Raquel Mazon Jeffers Senior Healthcare Program Office, The Nicholson Foundation, Member of Distinguished Panel of Honorees



"I know from my own struggles that addiction doesn't just affect the individual suffering but also their family

Taking Action - New Jersey Legislators Work Together to Tackle this Epidemic

New Jersey legislators, residents and organizations are pulling together to tackle this problem. Bi-partisan support for legislation designed to confront this issue is leading to positive steps toward ending the heroin/opiate scourge in New Jersey.



Spearheading this legislative effort is Senator Joseph Vitale, with a package of 21 Bills designed to take on the growing opiate crisis from several angles. Bills focus on: updating substance abuse curriculum in schools; requiring all physicians to register for New Jersey's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program to eliminate "doctor shopping"; increasing the number of "Project Medicine Drop" locations for individuals to drop off unused prescription drugs for safe disposal; and allowing police, EMS workers and trained citizens to dispense Narcan, an opiate antidote, to overdose victims. This is not an exhaustive list, but paints a picture of the work, dedication and comprehensive approach that is being taken. [Click here to see the full list of Bills.](#)

Positive Policy Progress in Motion

Another insightful change sweeping New Jersey, as well as the nation, is a shift in perspective. Legislators and providers are looking at addiction as an illness, rather than a character flaw. This is immensely important, in order to push legislation and broaden the capacity of our behavioral health system in helping those struggling with addiction. Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), behavioral health care is being recognized as a necessity and must be covered by insurance in parity with physical health care. In other words, insurance companies are required to cover treatment for addiction at the same rate as treatment for cancer.

MHANJ's Connect for Recovery Call Line



In December, 2015 the MHANJ launched an opiate-specific call line. The NJ Connect for Recovery Call Line was established to support two distinct groups across the state of New Jersey: those concerned with their own opiate use; and those who are experiencing distress related to the opiate use of a friend or family member. This service is a safe, confidential, nonjudgmental forum that New Jerseyans may call to connect, grow and transform through a unique combination of supportive counseling from Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors and

members and friends. If my personal story of recovery can help to just save one life, then that's the best possible gift I can ever ask for."
--Darren M. Prince, President and Chief Executive Officer, Prince Marketing Group, Special Honored Guest

Would you like to help MHANJ continue its advocacy initiatives?



Peer Specialists. [Click here to visit the NJ Connect for Recovery Call Line website.](#) (TTY phone number 877-294-4356).

Heroin and Opiate Treatment Modalities

[Click here](#) for an informative table outlining different treatment modalities for opiate addiction. The table includes pros and cons, as well as information about where these services are available throughout New Jersey.



Learn more about [MHANJ's Government Affairs](#) efforts.

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