

# State to launch addiction prevention campaign in 2017

Brittany Horn , The News Journal 9:17 p.m. EST December 14, 2016



(Photo: Getty Images/Ingram Publishing)

Delaware ranks No. 1 for the rate at which doctors prescribe high-dose opioids compared to the rest of the country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It's a statistic that is both alarming to state officials and indicative of a larger problem in Delaware, where more than 100 people continue to die of drug overdoses each year.

It's also one of the many reasons the state Division of Public Health will launch a \$250,000 educational community outreach campaign in early 2017 aimed at prescribers, residents and the community at large to fight opioid addiction on the front lines.

"I think there's a consensus among the prescribing community that we have an issue" in Delaware, said Dr. Karyl Rattay, director of the state Division of Public Health. "The reality is that practice change is happening too slow."

Because many people become addicted to painkillers through legal prescriptions, national efforts are underway by the CDC and other organizations to change the way and how often opioids are prescribed. Informing prescribers of these new regulations and how to translate them into the workplace is part of the state's campaign, Rattay said.



Karyl Thomas Rattay (Photo: Photo provided)

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Delaware is part of the Prescription Monitoring Program, which allows doctors to share information about what medications their patients are using and how much across the state. But even with this system, Rattay said the state has not seen a decrease in prescriptions written.

Statistics also show that one in four people who are prescribed and using opiates long-term struggle with opiate addiction, she said.

"We know that public education has to be an important piece of tackling the addiction epidemic," Rattay said.

That's where education comes in. Through pamphlets, a revamped [HelpsHereDE.com](http://HelpsHereDE.com) website and other measures, the state wants to reach consumers at all levels. From teaching patients alternative pain management to explaining to school-age children the dangers of opiates and their addictive qualities, the campaign looks to make information more accessible.



Screenshot from the current HelpIsHereDE.com website. (Photo: HELPISHEREDE.COM)

The state Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, which the Division of Public Health works closely with, will also use just over \$2 million per year for the next two years in federal grants to work on primary prevention and education regarding the misuse of prescription drugs, according to the state. It will also see \$371,000 per year for the next four years in grant money to increase the use of the Prescription Monitoring Program and the provider education.

The HelpIsHereDE.com website has been up and running for about two years and has only seen about 100,000 hits, said Division of Public Health spokeswoman Emily Knearl. The goal of that website is to be a landing page for those seeking help, and the numbers indicate that more exposure could be a big benefit, she said.

Secretary Rita Landgraf has said that plans are in the works to get live updates on how many treatment beds are available in each county on the website. Plans to integrate treatment provider information, as well as community support groups, family resources and instructions for educators, will also be a part of the redesign, Knearl said.

Campaigns like these can be difficult. In 2015, New Castle County spent \$500,000 on a media campaign to raise awareness about heroin's deadly effects. An interactive game that allowed people to make decisions about drugs garnered more than 60,000 views online and prompted nearly 70 requests for the Heroin Alert presentation, which shows firsthand the deadly effects of drug addiction.

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Drug overdose deaths have continued to grow, and experts openly denounce "scared straight" tactics often used in this programming. Rattay said the state is actively reviewing "LifeSkills Training," a school-based program delivered over 3 years that is considered an evidence-based approach to educating and preventing addiction. The program was also cited in the Surgeon General's report released last month.

This education is imperative, Rattay said, as 90 Delawareans have died of fentanyl overdoses in the first nine months of the year. That doesn't include the numerous others who have died of fatal heroin overdoses and the hundreds who have been

"If you're in an ER or detox situation, people understandably don't know where to turn," she said. "Remembering that website or the 800 number is important."

*Editor's note: The above story incorrectly identified the amount of money DSAMH will receive in federal grants to aid in primary prevention. It will receive just over \$2 million per year. The above story reflects these changes.*

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## **Do you or someone you know need help?**

Call the state's 24/7 Crisis Services Helpline:

New Castle County: 1-800-652-2929

Kent and Sussex counties: 1-800-345-6785

Visit [HelpsHereDE.com](http://HelpsHereDE.com)

Call 911 – the 911/Good Samaritan Law protects those who call 911 to report an overdose from being prosecuted for low-level drug crimes.