

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Nassau County's Approach to the Opioid Epidemic

The Nassau County Department of Human Services September Newsletter announced a move beyond the standard “arrest-first” approach to a more treatment centered option whereby users are connected to treatment rather than incarceration or other legal penalties.

This change on operating behavior is not new. As opioid overdoses continue to take the lives of tens of thousands of Americans every year, the epidemic has made many jurisdictions and public agencies that deal with health and safety reconsider long-held attitudes. For example, several cities are moving to establish safe-injection sites, something that would have been unthinkable to most local officials and policymakers just a few years ago. Medicaid programs have begun offering alternative methods of pain management, such as yoga and acupuncture, before prescribing opioids. And for police departments, an arrest-first mentality is beginning to give way to more compassionate approaches aimed at helping people struggling with addiction.

Two years ago, a handful of police departments began requiring officers -- frequently the first to encounter a victim -- to carry naloxone, the lifesaving drug that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. At least 1,200 police departments around the country now have some kind of program that equips officers with naloxone. A Detroit-area police force is a part of Hope Not Handcuffs initiative that allows anyone struggling with substance abuse to go without fear of arrest to a participating police department, which will work to place the person in a recovery program. Hope Not Handcuffs kicked off in February 2017 with police departments across five counties taking part. At the national level, the Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative, which was ahead of the curve when it was established in 2015, works similarly to Hope Not Handcuffs. It redirects people to recovery programs who might otherwise be arrested. The initiative has worked with more than 140 police departments. According to its annual report, in the program's first year, communities saw a decrease in addiction-related crimes by as much as 25 percent.

Additionally, in response to increasing fatal and nonfatal opiate overdoses by probationers, Nassau County Probation Department with Nassau County Office of Human Services developed an innovative program. Probationers with a recent non-fatal opiate overdose or history of opiate use are required to participate in the program with their guest. This state-of-the-art approach is based on the Harm Reduction model. The goal is to reduce harm associated with opioid abuse including the prevention of non-fatal and fatal overdose deaths, the reduction of disease transmission such as HIV and Hepatitis and training in the opiate overdose reversal drug Narcan.

This educational program attempts to mitigate the damage associated with opiate abuse and addiction, while the probationer is on the road to abstinence. Harm reduction acknowledges that completely abstaining from drugs isn't a realistic solution for everyone and that many probationers use drugs despite the strong efforts of probation supervision, various treatment organizations and government agencies that promote total abstinence. Abstinence is a process. Probationers should not suffer from disease or die from preventable causes on the road to abstinence. Methods of drug abuse that are safer than others will be presented along with proven treatment methods including the most promising Medically Assisted Treatments.

For more information about this Newsletter and Nassau County Health and Human Services please visit <https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/3590/Human-Services>.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE" to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org.