

NEWS RELEASE

Ilene Shapiro – Summit County Executive
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Community leaders remember those lost, highlight work to reduce overdoses

SUMMIT COUNTY, OHIO—This morning community leaders gathered for a virtual press conference on Overdose Awareness Day to honor and remember local lives lost to overdoses, and to discuss ongoing efforts to end the opioid epidemic and support recovery. The panel was moderated by Greta Johnson, Director of Communications and Assistant Chief of Staff for County Executive Shapiro. She was joined by Public Health Commissioner Donna Skoda, Medical Examiner Dr. Lisa Kohler, Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services Board Executive Director Aimee Wade, Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan, The Remedy Church Pastor Deante Lavender and Director of IBH's REACH Program Mark Salchak.

Johnson began the event by recognizing the lives lost to the opioid epidemic and offering support to the families feeling the devastating effects of it. She noted the epidemic has affected every community in the County and residents of all backgrounds. She emphasized continued collaboration between elected officials, non-profits, agencies, service providers, faith leaders is key to ending overdoses.

Dr. Kohler then detailed Summit County's overdose death numbers from 2022 and 2021. To date, her office has documented 156 overdose deaths in 2022. This number is only slightly behind where the County was one year ago with 157 overdose deaths year-to-date in 2021. Last year, she documented 235 overdose deaths. Although there is a minor difference in numbers between 2021 and 2022, the current number of overdose deaths is 17% higher than year-to-date numbers for 2020. The Medical Examiner continue to see primarily fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine being responsible for these deaths. A disturbing trend has been an increase in the number of overdose deaths in the black community particularly black females. The number of black females dying from overdoses so far this year is approaching the number of black females who died for the entire year in both of the previous two years.

Commissioner Skoda detailed Public Health's role in the fight, including supporting harm reduction, a strategy used to prevent overdoses and overdose death. SCPH currently offers free fentanyl test strips and Narcan kits. Residents can receive fentanyl test strips through the mail by registering at <https://www.scph.org/counseling/test-strips>. The registration can be completed anonymously. Residents can also request an overdose reversal kit at <https://www.scph.org/kit-request-form>. Commissioner Skoda also detailed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opioid epidemic. She said the effects of opioid

addiction coupled with the pandemic in Summit County has been catastrophic to the community, noting the negative toll it has taken on mental and physical health is unsurpassed.

Executive Director Wade highlighted the daily work undertaken at the ADM Board to combat the opioid epidemic. Her agency provides \$11,901,958 to 16 organizations that provide direct services to residents in need of addiction services. To reduce overdoses, ADM has distributed postcards educating recipients about free, mail order Narcan kits and how to request them. Starting in June 2022, over 81,000 postcards have been mailed in the zip codes with the highest rates of overdoses in Summit County. To date, 790 Narcan kits have been requested. Additionally, the ADM Board has increased its partnerships with local recovery agencies and funded numerous pilot programs aimed at providing resources, education, and recovery support to Summit County residents. They are also partnering with faith-based organizations in the African American and greater Akron community to increase education and awareness of addiction resources and supports.

Noting Akron's reputation as the birthplace of recovery, Mayor Horrigan noted there are various recovery programs and supports available to residents in need. He detailed the City's efforts to help reduce overdoses by training and supplying law enforcement and Fire Medics with naloxone. Police and fire are often the first responders to an overdose and can play a pivotal role in saving a life and helping individuals find a path to recovery. He said the City is looking at more creative ways to do more to help reduce overdoses and reduce the supply of illegal substances in the community.

Pastor Lavender shared a personal anecdote of overdose and cited the misconception that illegal substances today are just stronger. They are deadly due to fentanyl. He spoke about the need to reduce stigma and to show, not just tell those in need, what resources are available, particularly in the African American community because many members have historical mistrust of government and service providers. He called addiction a community issue, meaning it will take stakeholders from all sectors to solve. Pastor Lavender also advocated for the community to support residents with indirect addiction supports, like food, clothes and housing and other basic needs to help lessen the toll of addiction.

Mark Salchak bravely told his story and lived experience with addiction, and detailed IBH's programming, including efforts to continue treatment virtually during COVID-19. He explained the difference between treatment and recovery, calling treatment the discovery phase and recovery the next phase. He also highlighted the need to understand recovery looks different for each individual going through the process.

Closing the discussion, Johnson provided an update on the Opiate Abatement Advisory Council, convened in 2020 to help guide the County's spend of settlement funds. To date, the OAAC has distributed over \$7 million in grants to organizations, from the local hospital systems to small grassroots organizations. The group meets monthly to discuss funding opportunities. Later this year, the OAAC is holding a community engagement event on November 9 at 9:00 a.m. Interested residents can register for the event at <https://bit.ly/3pWbXcv>.

Overdose Awareness Day Events:

Remembrance of the lives lost on the All-American Bridge @ 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/overdose-awareness-day-tickets-394363781687>

Narcan Giveaway Events/Locations:

ADM Board Pop-Up & Ice Cream Social @ 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Catholic Charities St. John's Recovery Outreach Center, 1034 Brown Street St.

Community Health Services @ 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

702 E. Market St.

Summit County Public Health @ 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Arlington Plaza, 1400 S. Arlington Street #28

AND

Sept. 2 @ 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Summit County Public Health Fairway Office

1867 W. Market Street

ARC Recovery Services @ 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Barberton Farmers Market

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