

NEWS RELEASE

Ilene Shapiro – Summit County Executive
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Community leaders highlight work to combat overdoses, encourage treatment and recovery

SUMMIT COUNTY, OHIO—This morning, County Executive Ilene Shapiro joined community leaders for a panel discussion on Overdose Awareness Day to honor and remember those lives lost to overdoses, and to discuss ongoing efforts to end the opioid epidemic and support recovery. 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, The Remedy Church Pastor Deante Lavender and Catholic Charities Program Manager David Monter. The full panel recording is available [here](#).

The panel was held at Summit Artspace in conjunction with the [Overdose Awareness Exhibition](#). The free exhibition features artworks about personal experiences with overdose or in honor of a loved one who passed from an overdose. It runs August 31 to September 16.

The panel was moderated by Greta Johnson, Director of Communications and Assistant Chief of Staff for County Executive Shapiro. Johnson began the event by recognizing the lives lost to the opioid epidemic and offering support to the families feeling its devastating effects. She noted the epidemic has affected residents of all backgrounds across all 31 communities. She emphasized that continued collaboration between elected officials, non-profits, agencies, service providers, faith leaders is key to preventing overdoses.

Dr. Kohler then detailed Summit County's overdose death numbers. As of August 2023, the County has seen 163 individuals lost to an overdose. During August of 2022, that number was 155, representing an increase in overdose deaths year over year. She highlighted concerns about fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine overdoses driving this increase. Dr. Kohler indicated the County's overdose numbers continue to be lower than 2016, the year that marked a critical and tragic phase of the epidemic.

Commissioner Skoda highlighted Public Health's efforts to reduce harm to those using opiates and other substances. She explained the role of the SCPH is help individuals stay alive in order to access treatment. Her team does this through a variety of programs including safe needle exchange, wound care, fentanyl test strips and Narcan distribution. 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>.

Executive Director Wade discussed ADM's role in providing supports to the community. She noted the toll the COVID-19 pandemic took on individuals with mental health struggles and substance use disorders, and the efforts of the ADM Board to step into this space. She encouraged individuals and families to contact the ADM Addiction Helpline at 330-940-1133 to access critical community resources. Wade also shared her agency's efforts to collaborate with grassroots partners to educate the community about addiction and mental health and reduce stigma surround addiction.

Pastor Lavender shared his concerns about growing rates of addiction and overdoses in the Black community. He explained that epidemics rarely stay isolated to one population, highlighting the need to educate and support the entire community, not just a single demographic group. As a faith leader, he outlined the role every person can play in providing indirect support to those struggling with addiction. Lavender also challenged the community to shift from a negative mindset of preventing death to a positive mindset of helping people live.

County Executive Shapiro provided an update on the County's settlement funds. To date, the Opiate Abatement Advisory Council has distributed over \$14 million in grants to organizations, from the local hospital systems to small grassroots organizations. Executive Shapiro's focus has been twofold: prevention and systems change. To prevent overdoses and deaths, the County has funded medication assisted treatment in emergency rooms, small grants to over 40 grassroots non-profits, case management services for individuals leaving the jail and need exchange programs, among others. To facilitate systemwide changes, the County has invested settlement funds in the Unite Us platform, a closed loop referral system that reduces barriers on the road to recovery. Forty community organizations in Summit County have already committed to the using the platform and others are being recruited to join in the future.

Skoda and Wade announced the launch of a new Public Health Vending Machine in partnership with CHC Addiction Services. Located at CHC Addiction Services' East Side location at 725 E Market St, this vending machine provides free 24/7/365 access to naloxone, wound care kits, safer sex kits, fentanyl test strips, and other items to registered clients. Registration is free, confidential and anonymous, and can be completed for immediate access with a valid email address by scanning the QR code on the front of the machine. Registration can also be completed by calling SCPH at (330) 375-2984 and speaking with staff or leaving a message for a call back within 24-48 hours. Naloxone will always be available with or without registration 24/7/365 by following the steps on the front of the machine.

Focusing on individuals in treatment and in recovery, Monter described success for individuals living with substance use means the ability to live life to their full potential. He explained that treatment and recovery are not the same, with the former being a formal process and latter being a lifelong journey. His mission is to keep people alive, supported and successful. Monter called on others to recognize that addiction is not a choice or an individual problem. Addiction is a community problem requiring a community-wide response.

Closing the discussion, Executive Shapiro asked the community to keep the families and friends who have lost loved ones in their thoughts, and to come together to heal and prevent overdoses.

Opening Event on Aug. 31 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Exhibition open to the public until Sept. 16

Summit Artspace 3rd Floor

140 E. Market St. Free parking available.

August 31 Naloxone Giveaway Events/Locations:

Green Fire Department

4200 Massillon Rd, Green

During open hours

Just A Dad From Akron (JADFA)

937 Kenmore Blvd, Akron

11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Akron Treatment Services

87 Conservatory Dr

5:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

United Way of Summit & Medina

37 North High Street, Akron

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

IBH Addiction Recovery, Firestone Park

1601 S Main Street, Akron

12:00 to 2:00 p.m.

Hope United and Tyler's Redemption Place – Open House

2684 Sanitarium Road, Akron

2:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Summit Artspace/Overdose Awareness Exhibit

140 E Market St, Akron

4:00 to 6:00 p.m.



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