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Drug overdose deaths decrease in ND; prevention efforts remain crucial

BISMARCK, N.D. – North Dakota received good news recently when the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported online that overdose deaths in the state decreased for the first time since a record 77 deaths were reported in 2016. According to the CDC, drug overdose deaths in North Dakota fell by 13.2 percent to 68 deaths in 2017.

While the news is encouraging, North Dakota Department of Human Services officials said now is not the time to be complacent. Behavioral Health Division Director Pamela Sagness said prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery support for people affected by the disease of addiction remain vital to saving lives.

“It is great to begin seeing results from the programs and efforts being implemented across the state,” Sagness said. “We need to continue local and state efforts and expand services to all individuals in need or at risk.”

She said, a federal State Opioid Response Grant from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is providing key funding to help North Dakota sustain and expand efforts to prevent overdose deaths through prevention, treatment and recovery activities. Legally prescribed and illicit opioids accounted for about 67.8 percent of all drug overdose deaths nationally in 2017.

The two-year grant is providing \$4 million per year, which the division will use to reduce unmet treatment needs and increase access to medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder.

While North Dakota’s rate of drug overdose deaths per 100,000 residents remains among the lowest in the nation at 9.2, one death is too many; and the department and its partners continue to work to save more lives.

Opioid use disorder affects individuals of all ages and incomes. In 2017, around 14 percent for North Dakota high school students reported using prescription pain medication without a doctor’s prescription (2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

Sagness said, the new grant funding will allow the state to increase comprehensive evidence-based care coordination and treatment and recovery support services. The division intends to contract for services and will issue requests for proposals soon. Organizations from across the state will have an opportunity to submit proposals to increase recovery housing supports, in-home therapy and care coordination services for individuals with an opioid use disorder.

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The division will continue its statewide communication strategy to educate the public on what puts a person at risk for an opioid overdose, the signs of an overdose and the most effective response – including the use of the overdose-reversal medication: naloxone. Learn more about the effort at www.prevention.nd.gov/stopoverdose.

Another program that continues to expand because of the availability of grant funds is the ONE Rx (Opioid and Naloxone Education) program. This is an innovative approach used at participating community pharmacies in the state to screen and educate patients who receive prescribed opioid medications.

The Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division is responsible for reviewing and identifying service needs and activities in the state's behavioral health system to ensure health and safety, access to services and quality services. It also establishes quality assurance standards for the licensure of substance use disorder program services and facilities and provides policy leadership in partnership with public and private entities. For more information, visit www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov.

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Number of Drug Overdose Deaths	
Year	North Dakota
2013	20
2014	43
2015	61
2016	77
2017	68

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>