What Dayton, Ohio, Is Doing Right in the Opioid Fight

Fatal overdoses are down more than 50 percent since last year, an astounding turnaround for one of the nation's addiction hot spots.

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Last year, Dayton, Ohio, had one of the highest overdose death rates in the country. But now, fatal overdoses are down more than 50 percent—and health workers fighting opioid addiction across the country are taking note, The New York Times reports.

According to the latest reports from Montgomery County, where Dayton is located, there have been 250 overdose deaths so far in 2018 compared with 548 deaths by November 30 last year. It's clear something incredible is happening.

Experts say the city may be leading an abatement of the U.S. opioid epidemic that killed nearly 50,000 people last year alone. In fact, new statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that for the first time in years, the number of opioid deaths nationwide has begun to fall, as have opioid prescription rates, and far fewer Americans are trying heroin.

In Dayton, health officials say a variety of factors have contributed to the impressive drop in mortality. For one thing, Ohio Governor John Kasich's decision to expand Medicaid in 2015 gave nearly 700,000 low-income adults access to free addiction and mental health treatment. The result? More than a dozen new treatment providers have sprung up in Dayton over the past year alone, including residential programs and outpatient clinics where people can receive methadone, buprenorphine, naltrexone and other medication-assisted therapies.

The state has also started spending $1 billion a year to address the opioid epidemic, with funds going toward Medicaid and paying for people who go to jail and lose their state-funded insurance to remain in treatment while incarcerated.

Another factor in the city's overdose decline has been the dwindling presence of carfentanil—a dangerous prescription opioid similar to fentanyl notorious for its potency and overdose-inducing potential. Additionally, Drug Enforcement Agency officers say many traffickers have stopped mixing the drug into their products after noticing how many of their customers were dying, which has led to fewer deaths.

What’s more, naloxone, the overdose-reversing drug commonly known as Narcan, is everywhere. Last year, Montgomery county distributed 3,300 naloxone kits and are on course to more than double that number this year and are hosting trainings at local treatment centers, 12-step meetings, businesses and schools across the city.

Advocates also say the city has an “unusually large” network of recovery support groups, syringe exchanges and peer support services. These harm reduction efforts have been bolstered by a slew of studies showing just how much they can help prevent deaths and infections such as HIV, hepatitis C virus (HCV) and endocarditis.

To learn more about opioids and hepatitis risk, click here.

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