Ohio Journalists Team Up to Boost Coverage of the State's Opioid and Hep C Crises

October 10, 2017

More than 20 news outlets in Ohio recently partnered to cover the state's ongoing heroin, overdose and hepatitis C virus (HCV) crises. The statewide media project, titled Your Voice Ohio, was assembled to help raise awareness about the syndemic and to help community members share their potential solutions to the region's fight against opioid addiction, WKSU reports.

So far, the project has reported that nearly 4,000 people are dying of drug overdoses in the state every year and that tens of thousands of Ohio residents are currently addicted to drugs like heroin, fentanyl and prescription painkillers.

As part of the collaboration, the city of Cincinnati recently created and shared an online overdose tracker with up-to-date information on local heroin deaths. Meanwhile, in Mahoning Valley, journalists are having conversations with state and local lawmakers, using their reporting to explore solutions to the heroin crisis across the state. Additionally, local journalists have been producing a wide array of news reports about Ohio's opioid crisis as part of the project to help raise awareness.

Some of the proposed solutions these reports have yielded are fascinating. For example, in southwestern Ohio, journalist's data on emergency medical services calls revealed to local emergency responders that overdoses did not in fact peak on weekends as had been assumed but on Wednesday afternoons, around 2 p.m. The report helped significantly reduce emergency response times and staffing costs for the region. Local reports have also taught paramedics and hospital workers to be less aggressive in reviving people who overdose with the overdose-reversal inhalant naloxone, after reporters found that too much of the lifesaving drug could send victims into painful withdrawal, often making them angry and more likely to deny offers of treatment or counseling.

Other findings from the project are a grim reminder of the long-term effects of heroin addiction. For example, in Ross County, south of Columbus, a Reuters report found that the local children services office has seen its cost double and that three fourths of the children in need are from homes affected by heroin and often require extensive counseling and treatment. The project also reveals that many Ohio counties are facing soaring costs for jails, EMS and health interventions.

Moving forward, Your Voice Ohio says it will continue to reorient statewide media coverage to better inform the public discussion around opioid addiction. These efforts will include tracking and evaluating data, gathering solutions and supplying resources to help Ohio confront the epidemic. You can read the project's reports here.

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