Overdoses, Hepatitis C on the Rise in Colorado

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A new report from Colorado's Heroin Response Work Group sheds some light on the state's opioid epidemic, showing that overdoses have nearly doubled and new cases of hepatitis C virus (HCV) have increased 80 percent since 2011, Occupational Health & Safety reports.

The report, titled Heroin in Colorado was put together by a multi-agency work group including representatives from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Attorney General's Office, as well as harm reduction advocates across the state.

In addition to recent upticks in overdoses and hepatitis C, the "preliminary assessment" of the state's opioid crisis also reveals that heroin seizures rose nearly 2,035 percent from 2011 to 2015, from 20 to 427 seizures a year. Arrests for heroin have also soared, increasing from 743 in 2011 to 4,575 in 2016.

Documented use of naloxone by emergency medical services to reverse suspected overdoses also increased from 997 instances in 2011 to 3,393 in 2016, while new cases of hepatitis C suspected to be related to injection drug use also increased from 379 in 2011 to 729 in 2016. The report also includes a survey of Colorado heroin users conducted at methadone clinics across the state.

"This first-ever report provides the sobering statistics and serves as our call to action to do all we can to help our citizens avoid its use and provide support to those on the front lines of battling its misuse," said Colorado Lt. Gov. Donna Lynne in a recent statement about the study.

Moving forward, Colorado health and law enforcement officials say they plan to continue taking proactive measures to tackle the state's heroin crisis by gathering more comprehensive data that can help focus the state's resources where most needed.

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