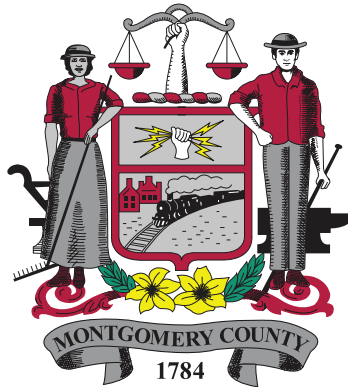


Montgomery County Overdose Task Force



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Introduction

Opioid-related overdoses have reached national epidemic levels and continue to climb rapidly. In 2010-2011, Pennsylvania ranked 14th in the nation for prescription and heroin fatalities, rising quickly to a 7th place ranking in 2012-2013. Montgomery County saw 83 drug related deaths in 2009 and 134 deaths in 2013 – an increase of 61% in just four years. In 2009, there were 20 Heroin deaths in Montgomery County, increasing by 130% to 46 Heroin deaths in 2013. Industry professionals suggest the reason for such a dramatic surge may be attributed to the demand of prescription medications containing highly addictive synthetic opioids. In 2012, it is estimated that health care providers distributed close to 300 million prescriptions for opioid painkillers, the equivalent of one for every American adult. In many cases the patient becomes addicted to these legally prescribed narcotics. Unable to obtain more of the prescribed medicine, they then turn to illicit opioids, namely Heroin, which is cheaper, easier to obtain, and far more likely to cause overdose and death.

In September 2014, Commission Chairman Josh Shapiro announced the establishment of the Montgomery County Overdose Task Force to analyze the issue of increased opioid deaths and provide recommendations on how the county could help combat this epidemic. Part of the challenge of this crisis is the diversity of the people whom it affects and how it affects them, therefore it requires a response with a variety of approaches that involve multiple disciplines. In that spirit, the MCOTF is made up of substance abuse and medical professionals, educators, law enforcement, and concerned citizens to join them in exploring programs and protocol in prevention, treatment and recovery. Additionally, the MCOTF analyzed this issue from the perspectives of Health Care, Legislation, Law Enforcement, Public Education, Primary Education, and Recidivism Prevention.

We believe the following recommendations will provide for a multidisciplinary strategy that will reduce life-threatening prescription drug and heroin overdoses. These recommendations were selected to attack this issue from a variety of angles including Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Problem Evaluation & Analysis. This is a complex challenge that will take time to address; therefore we have divided our recommendations into short and long-term initiatives. We believe these recommendations encompass a positive community approach that focuses on education while fostering collaboration to reduce the incidence of drug overdoses and, especially, drug overdose deaths in Montgomery County.

Immediate Recommendations

I. Prevention

Objective: Increase public awareness of life-threatening opioid addiction and abuse.

- Montgomery County should continue to develop and promote approved public educational programs, public service announcements and educational materials to:
 - Warn the public about the dangers of opioid prescription abuse and addiction
 - Warn the public about the dangers and lethality of all heroin use
 - Assist people struggling with addiction (and their families, friends, etc.)
 - Provide guidance where citizens can get help with their drug, alcohol, or other human services-related problems.

Objective: Ensure that the many law enforcement agencies in Montgomery County provide special focus and coordination on drug-related cases involving opioid or heroin overdoses or overdose deaths.

- The Montgomery County District Attorney's office should convene a meeting of representatives of the numerous Law Enforcement resources in Montgomery County that do drug investigations to emphasize and coordinate heroin-related and opioid prescription related drug investigations, and especially focus on and coordinate investigations regarding drug overdoses and drug overdose deaths.

Objective: Reduce the availability of unneeded prescription drugs in homes that can be abused.

- The Montgomery County District Attorney's office should continue to expand the "Drug Take-Back Box" Program to more locations. They should also consider continuing to implement "Drug Take-Back" events where citizens can bring in their unused drugs for proper disposal. Officials should seek additional publicity on the value of the drug take-back initiative and the presence of the boxes across the County. The DA's office should work to develop a safe means of destroying these drugs.

Objective: Increase school participation in evidence based drug and alcohol prevention/intervention services.

- A letter of encouragement from the Commissioners to:

- Schools that have declined Drug and Alcohol Prevention Services stressing the importance of Evidence Based Prevention Curricula.
- Montgomery County School Districts that will reinforce and validate the need for participation in the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) so the state can aggregate this very necessary diagnostic data.
- To the colleges and universities within the County to encourage them to incorporate a substance abuse educational/awareness component to their First Year Experience seminars or classes.
- The Montgomery County Office of Drug and Alcohol will present an annual report to the Commissioners Office that will outline the level of school district participation in Drug and Alcohol Prevention/Intervention Education services.
- Engage high schools in Montgomery County by creating a public service announcement contest. Students would create a PSA that focuses on prescription medication overdoses, substance abuse, etc. This would be open to all high schools/middle schools in Montgomery County for the school year 2015-2016. Through online voting, a winning PSA will be chosen and the Task Force will engage community partners to showcase the students' work.

II. Intervention

Objective: Ensure that Municipal Police Officers and EMS professionals in Montgomery County provide life-saving assistance to overdose victims that is as swift and as coordinated as possible.

- The Montgomery County Department of Public Safety should continue to bring together Police, EMS, and Hospital representatives to determine if the current protocols ensure that delivery of life-saving aid is as coordinated and rapid as possible.
- Additionally, the group should work together to determine that appropriate protocols and training are put in place for Police officers with departments that chose to carry and administer Naloxone.
- MCDPS-EMS division will assist participating agencies in determining/projecting their ongoing costs associated with this program.
- Increase the likelihood that possible drug overdoses are reported more quickly than in the past by publicizing the new Pennsylvania laws providing amnesty for other drug users who report the overdose in a timely manner and indemnification for “Good Samaritans” who try to assist an overdose victim.

Objective: Improve the ease that citizens can connect with all Montgomery County Human services, including addiction and overdose-related services.

- Montgomery County should, through the office of Drug and Alcohol, work with the Community Connections program to provide basic training or education for Navigates on overdose related issues. The Community Connections program has proven to be a successful front door to the cadre of county and community services available to those in need of a variety of human services and could provide a one-stop-shop access to services for those facing addiction.

III. Treatment

Objective: Increase professional awareness and education of life-threatening opioid abuse.

- Montgomery County should further promote and encourage the use of the State’s Drug and Alcohol Department programs for professionals focusing on opioids and the overdose crisis, through the County Office of Drug and Alcohol.
- Montgomery County should create a comprehensive day-long symposium aimed at public education around overdose awareness. This symposium should offer different tracks, including healthcare professionals, educators, family and friends of those in recovery, law enforcement, among others.
- Montgomery County Commissioners should engage the Montgomery County Medical Society to encourage healthcare professionals, especially those writing prescriptions for narcotics or any other medication with addictive qualities, to have a complete understanding of medications being prescribed, develop detailed healthcare plans for patients using these prescriptions and their families/ caregivers, and to have a thorough understanding of the various treatment methods used to address addiction.

Objective: Improve recovery opportunities for those currently struggling with opioid addiction.

- The County should determine the feasibility of adding Certified Recovery Specialists as part of treatment protocol.
- As addiction is a lifetime and chronic disease, an aftercare program including follow up services that would assist with employment, housing, and training options to promote long term recovery. Programs like “In His Eyes” is a volunteer driven initiative that has successfully established a re-entry program for offenders as well as others struggling with these life skills issues.
- Improve communication with the local County Assistance Office (CAO) in order to dedicate a local State CAO staff person to complete the “expedited enrollment” process for individuals with substance use disorders so that they can become qualified for Medical Assistance in order to access treatment service dollars through the HealthChoices project.

Objective: The Commissioners should continue in their support of Drug Treatment Court.

- Drug Treatment Court is a long term, evidence based, and highly structured Treatment Court program that adheres to all nationally recognized best standards. Participants are clinically screened and risk/need assessments are performed to determine the appropriate level of care and address any public safety concerns. The program is designed to last between fifteen and thirty months depending on the participant's progress and supervision. There is mandated drug testing and accountability. The Judge is trained in Motivational Interviewing an EBP that validates the cognitive change of the participant and is a member of a multidisciplinary team that includes a program coordinator, Public Defender, District Attorney, Probation Officers, and treatment providers.

IV. Problem Evaluation & Analysis

Objective: Develop a method to report and collect accurate and current overdose and overdose fatality data for proper analysis and future planning.

- The Montgomery County Coroner's office should convene a meeting of leaders representing the District Attorney, Police, MCDPS, Montgomery County Child Death Review Team, and Hospitals to develop a uniform, countywide protocol to report and submit information about drug overdose cases, especially overdoses that result in fatalities.
- This subcommittee should also determine:
 - Who will accumulate and store the data
 - How it can be accessed
 - Who will analyze the data and provide reports to the County Commissioners and all interested parties working to address this crisis.

Long-term Recommendations

The initiatives outlined thus far represent initial findings and a plan to continue addressing the opioid overdose problem we are experiencing. This issue is expansive and will require further investigation and analysis to be done by the Task Force moving forward. We recommend that the Task Force continue to work on this issue and evaluate the initiatives outlined in this proposal and report back to the Commissioners every six months. Additionally, we have identified areas in which the Task Force should be initially focused on during this upcoming year. These include the following objectives:

Objective: Improve recovery opportunities for those currently struggling with opioid addiction.

- County Office of Drug and Alcohol has agreed to fund a licensed halfway house in Pottstown for 2015-2016 along with Magellan Behavior Health. The office of Drug and Alcohol should monitor this pilot and report to the Task Force.
- Recovery Centers are costly and are often limited regarding government funding. It would be more financially solid to fund a Certified Recovery Specialist position(s) as the specialist has the ability to work within an already existing program and assist with the needs of those in the early stages of recovery.

Objective: Continue to encourage State and National governments and agencies to provide for laws and policies that are in line with the goals of the MCOTF.

- The MCOTF has seen success in efforts to lobby the PA Legislature for the adoption of PA SB1180. As the following issues/ areas of legislation come up, the MCOTF evaluate the legislation and will employ similar efforts to ensure its passage:
 - Increasing criminal penalties for unlawful distribution of Oxycodone, Heroin or any other Schedule I or II Narcotic
 - Medical practice ownership and management
 - Increase oversight of prescribers employees

Conclusion

Since created in June 2014, the Montgomery County Overdose Taskforce has met to address the increase in opioid overdoses in Montgomery County. We have discussed current county systems, researched practices from other locations, and developed a well thought out plan of action to assist the County in moving forward to combat the issue of increased opioid related deaths. This report reflects the Taskforce fulfillment of its original goal of creating a list of strategies to reduce life threatening overdoses. Our multi-disciplinary team was realistic in our ambitions for this assignment. We started with the understanding that we cannot, nor was it our mission, to eradicate addiction. But, rather we were tasked to focus on curbing overdose deaths, and the more permanent solutions to addiction are a far broader topic -beyond our scope.

We have divided this report into short and long term goals in order to reflect our understanding that this problem requires continual support and examination beyond the limitations of a time-limited taskforce. We focused on more quickly implemented strategies for a more immediate impact. During this process, laws and best practices were rapidly changing. It is important to go beyond this initial report, to have some continual mechanism which will oversee, monitor and coordinate activities in an ever changing landscape of initiatives related to overdose.

This report has divided our recommendations into broad categories including those that are related to treatment, public education, prevention and program evaluation. All of these areas must be considered as we move forward to create a comprehensive plan of action. We are confident that our recommendations, if implemented, will result in the positive outcome of a reduction of opioid related deaths in Montgomery County.