



State of New Jersey

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Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Launches Statewide Addiction Awareness Campaign and "KnowAddiction" Website

TRENTON – The Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (GCADA) today launched a statewide advertising and awareness campaign, "Addiction Does Not Discriminate," and the website KnowAddiction.nj.gov, which will help fight the opiate abuse epidemic by showing that no one is immune to this deadly drug problem, and providing New Jerseyans with information on preventing abuse, recognizing when loved ones are at risk, and finding treatment.

Today's announcement represents the implementation of the first of the recommendations contained in a Task Force report commissioned by GCADA, which was released in March 2014. Today's announcement is made during National Prevention Week, an observance dedicated to increasing public awareness of substance abuse issues. The announcement was made at Jersey Shore University Medical Center, in Neptune.

The awareness campaign represents a partnership between GCADA and the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, including its Division of Consumer Affairs, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, and Division of State Police; the New Jersey Department of Human Services and its Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services; the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of New Jersey; the New Jersey Department of Education; and the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey.

GCADA Elected Chairman Neil Van Ess said, "We are fighting a well-documented epidemic in which the abuse of prescription painkillers traps young people in addiction and leads them to heroin. Our awareness campaign will help erase the stereotype of the heroin user as a back-alley denizen. It will help parents and young people understand that addiction is a disease, and that it can affect any family and every community."

The ad campaign is funded by the Division of Consumer Affairs, Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, Department of Human Services, and New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) task force.

From May through September, during the height of the summer season in which many young people are pressured to experiment with drugs, the campaign will include heavy outdoor advertising across New Jersey, with a special emphasis on the Shore areas that have seen an increase in opiate addiction deaths. The ads feature a composite face representing the fact that prescription drug abuse and heroin addiction transcend demographic groups. They also bear the message, “Your medicine cabinet could be a gateway to heroin,” and the web address KnowAddiction.nj.gov.

The website connects New Jerseyans with resources about addiction and addiction-related issues, including how to help prevent family members, friends, students, patients, co-workers and others from experimenting with prescription drug abuse; how to identify the signs that an individual is at risk of addiction or is hiding a drug problem; and how to find and take advantage of addiction treatment.

In the coming months, GCADA and its partners, including the members of GCADA’s Alliance to Prevent Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and other agencies, will build on the “Addiction Does Not Discriminate” campaign by distributing outreach materials to schools, community groups, and other venues. The tagline “Your medicine cabinet could be the gateway to heroin” will alternate with other messages intended to reach various target audiences and make them aware of the important roles they play in fighting the crisis of heroin and prescription painkiller abuse.

Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman said, “We are fighting the opiate abuse epidemic through strict criminal and regulatory enforcement involving our Opiates Task Force and the New Jersey Prescription Monitoring Program, and through outreach in which we engage directly with the general public and the healthcare community. This awareness campaign will encourage New Jerseyans to take responsibility for their role in prevention and treatment.”

“No one experiments with drugs thinking they will become addicted; the disease is insidious that way,” said Jennifer Velez, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services, which oversees drug prevention and treatment programs for adults statewide through its Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services. “This ad campaign serves as a critical wake-up call. We know from our work in this area that addiction affects people of all ages, races and socioeconomic backgrounds.”

“Monmouth and Ocean counties are experiencing a heroin epidemic, with an unprecedented amount of deaths attributed to heroin abuse. The *Addiction Does Not Discriminate* campaign carries an important message that heroin use can be deadly, and it’s affecting all our communities. In response to the crisis, Meridian Behavioral Health’s Addiction Recovery Services offers comprehensive, compassionate care for those in recovery and their families. We’re also providing continued medical education for physicians and caregivers, and supporting the work of our community advisory committee volunteers, who are raising awareness about drug abuse in schools, churches and community centers,” comments Steven G. Littleton, FACHE, Executive Vice President of Meridian Health.

The Task Force Report, “Confronting New Jersey’s New Drug Problem: A Strategic Action Plan to Address a Burgeoning Heroin/Opiate Epidemic Among Adolescents and Young Adults,” can be found in its entirety at gcada.nj.gov/policy/master/ .

The skyrocketing use of heroin and other opiates has become the number one health crisis confronting New Jersey. Drug overdose deaths now surpass the number of deaths resulting from motor vehicle accidents, which had always been the leading cause of accidental death in the United States. This startling fact underscores the urgency of the situation New Jersey now faces. In 2013 New Jersey saw nearly 6,700 admissions to State-licensed or certified substance abuse treatment programs due to prescription drug abuse, an increase of nearly 300 percent over the past decade. More than 30 percent of opiate admissions for treatment involved persons 25 years old or younger.

GCADA helps review and coordinate State departments’ efforts in regard to the planning and provision of treatment, prevention, research, evaluation, and education services for, and public awareness of, alcoholism and drug abuse. It also administers the State’s \$10 million Alliance to Prevent Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Program, which is the largest network of community-based anti-drug coalitions in the nation, encompassing more than 500 municipalities, involving thousands of individuals and stakeholders passionately committed to creating healthy and safe communities throughout New Jersey.

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