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State releases Hawaii Opioid Initiative Action Plan Multi-agency efforts create statewide strategy

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health today announced the unveiling of the Hawaii Opioid Initiative action plan, a statewide road map for prevention and treatment of opioid and other substance misuse issues. The plan was created through a collaborative, multi-agency approach that began in July. To view the full plan, go to <http://health.hawaii.gov/substance-abuse/survey/>.

“Fortunately, Hawaii has not yet experienced the magnitude of the opioid crisis seen in other parts of the country,” said Gov. David Y. Ige. “While emerging issues and concerns in the state are on the rise, we have been given a relatively unique opportunity to proactively respond, prepare and prevent the crisis from reaching the same magnitude.”

The Statewide Action Plan is a comprehensive strategy to aggressively counteract the increased abuse and misuse of opioids in Hawaii. The plan is designed to sustain a system-wide, coordinated and proactive response to not only opioids, but also methamphetamine and other prevalent drugs. The collaborative effort is led by the Department of Health, together with the Department of the Attorney General, Department of Human Services Med-QUEST Division, Department of Public Safety Narcotics Enforcement Division and a wide range of community groups.

To halt the looming opioid threat, the state is moving forward with the Statewide Action Plan on opioids, portions of which have already been implemented. The plan identifies six key focus areas:

- **Treatment Access:** Improve and modernize healthcare strategies and access for opioid and other substance misuse treatment and recovery services.
- **Prescriber Education:** Improve opioid and related prescribing practices by working with healthcare providers and payers.

- **Data Informed Decision Making:** Implement system-wide routine data collection, sharing and dissemination to increase knowledge and inform practice.
- **Prevention and Public Education:** Improve community-based programs and public education to prevent opioid misuse and related harms.
- **Pharmacy-based Interventions:** Increase consumer education and prescription harm management through pharmacy-based strategies.
- **Support Law Enforcement and First Responders:** Coordinate operations and services, support specialized training for first responders and assure effective laws and policies.

The plan's objectives include establishing a coordinated entry system to process substance use disorder treatment referrals for primary care providers; implementing year-round "drop-off and take back" sites at a minimum of two county police stations within the state for safe and secure disposal of unused medications; and implementing a standing order to allow pharmacists to dispense Naloxone to reduce the incidence of opioid deaths due to overdose.

"This plan is a living document and should be viewed as a beginning rather than an end," said Edward Mersereau, chief of the Hawaii Department of Health Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division. "To maintain momentum, working groups will continue to meet to track progress and to expand or adjust the plan as additional data and outcomes are obtained."

Opioids are highly-addictive narcotic substances commonly prescribed to treat pain. Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time as prescribed by a doctor. However, regular use of opioids can lead to psychological dependence, and when taken in combination with alcohol and other depressants may stop a person's breathing and heart altogether, resulting in death.

Nationwide, 140 Americans die each day from drug overdoses, with 91 caused by opioids, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In Hawaii, drug overdose deaths account for 23 percent of all fatal injuries which include deaths from prescription opioids, according to the Hawaii Department of Health Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention System Branch. Hawaii currently ranks 43rd in the nation in drug overdose deaths.

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