



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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## **Hawai'i Department of Health receives \$8 million federal grant to continue fight against opioid misuse**

HONOLULU — The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) has received an \$8 million federal grant over a two-year period to continue to combat opioid misuse in the state. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) last week announced it awarded more than \$1 billion in opioid-specific grants to help states combat the crisis in the nation.

“No state is immune from this public health issue,” said Dr. Bruce Anderson, director of the Hawai'i Department of Health. “This grant provides another step in a positive direction for Hawaii to implement HHS’ comprehensive five-pronged strategy to address opioid misuse across our islands.”

According to a survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which is a part of HHS, Americans initiating heroin use dropped by around half from 2016 to 2017. The number of Americans misusing opioids also dropped for the second year in a row, and the number receiving specialty treatment for heroin use increased.

From January 2017 through August 2018, the amount of opioids prescribed in America has dropped by 21 percent. During the same period, the number of prescriptions filled for naloxone, used to counter opioid addiction, has increased 264 percent, while the number of prescriptions for buprenorphine, one form of medication-assisted treatment, has risen 16 percent.

Hawai'i's opioid death rates have historically been lower than the national rate. In 2016, there were 77 opioid-related overdose deaths in Hawai'i—a rate of 5.2 deaths per 100,000 persons. This is less than half the national rate of 13.3 deaths per 100,000 persons.

“We should not look at these figures and let our guard down; we must continue the momentum that we have begun in Hawai'i,” warned Edward Mersereau, chief of DOH's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division. “In Hawai'i, drug overdose deaths account for nearly a quarter of all fatal injuries, which include deaths from prescription opioids.”

“In Hawai‘i, we all know a relative or friend who has been affected by drug misuse or addiction, including those who were taking a prescribed opioid as directed for pain relief,” Mersereau added. “The social, economic and health disparities in our state, including access to behavioral health care, also make us particularly vulnerable to opioid and other drug misuse.”

“This award doubles the level of funding Hawai‘i has received from HHS to combat the opioid crisis and support drug abuse prevention” said Edward Heidig, Regional Director, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Region IX, which includes Hawai‘i. “HHS Secretary Azar has accelerated the deployment of unprecedented levels of resources that allow states like Hawai‘i to fight opioid use disorder, a medical condition that has become a national epidemic.”

This is a second round of federal funding for Hawai‘i. The health department received a \$4 million Opioid State Targeted Response (STR) grant, which was part of a program created by the 21st Century Cures Act. The grant program is administered by SAMHSA within HHS.

The SAMHSA grant has been used to successfully launch a collaborative, statewide effort to develop the Hawai‘i Opioid Initiative action plan, which was designed to be a “living document.” It offers a comprehensive approach to aggressively counteract the misuse of opioids and other prevalent drugs, such as methamphetamine in Hawai‘i.

Mersereau said the majority of the funding—about 60 percent—will be earmarked for prevention programs and the remainder will be used for treatment and recovery initiatives. “The grant funds will continue to support the collective efforts of the Hawai‘i Opioid Initiative and fulfill the objectives of the action plan over the coming year. “I’m so proud of the hard work and accomplishments achieved over the past year, but there is still a lot of work yet to be done,” he said.

Gov. David Ige will re-convene a meeting of Hawai‘i Opioid Initiative participants to review the accomplishments of the plan’s implementation over the last year and to discuss strategies for the coming year. The meeting will be held at the Hawai‘i State Capitol this week.

The collaborative effort spearheaded by the Department of Health includes participation from the Department of the Attorney General, Department of Human Services Med-QUEST Division, Department of Public Safety Narcotics Enforcement Division, the county police departments, and numerous other community groups.

The action areas identified in the plan include:

- Improving and modernizing healthcare strategies and access to opioid and other substance misuse treatment and recovery services;
- Improving prescribing practices among healthcare providers and health insurance companies for opioid and other potentially addictive medications;
- Improving systemwide routine data collection and dissemination to inform decision-making and determine best practices;

- Improving community-based programs and public education to prevent opioid misuse, such as the Hawai'i Medication Drop Box Program that was launched in July 2018 as a result of the support of the Department of the Attorney General, Department of Public Safety, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Hawai'i, Maui, Honolulu, and Kaua'i Police Departments;
- Increasing consumer education and prescription harm management through pharmacy-based strategies; and
- Supporting law enforcement and first responders by providing specialized training and ensuring effective laws and policies. This includes the use of Naloxone to reduce the incidence of opioid deaths due to overdose.

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### **About the Hawai'i Opioid Initiative**

The Hawai'i Opioid Initiative action plan is a comprehensive strategy to aggressively counteract the increased abuse and misuse of opioids in Hawai'i. The plan is designed to sustain a systemwide, coordinated and proactive response to not only opioids, but also methamphetamine and other drugs. The collaborative effort is led by the Hawai'i 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 other community groups. For details on the six focus areas in the Hawai'i Opioid Initiative action plan, visit [hawaiiopioid.org](http://hawaiiopioid.org).