



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Hawai'i Department of Health awarded additional \$2 million in federal grant funds to continue opioid crisis prevention efforts

HONOLULU — The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) has received \$2,107,130 in federal grant funds, in addition to an initial \$8 million grant received last year, to address and prevent the opioid crisis in Hawai'i. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently announced this second installment of funding for state opioid response grants. Administered through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, a total of \$487 million is being granted directly to states to continue combatting the ongoing opioid crisis. The funding will expand access to treatment that works, especially medication-assisted treatment with appropriate social supports.

"I'm very pleased Hawai'i has received this additional funding to support the implementation of our comprehensive plan to fight opioid misuse," said Gov. David Ige. "We appreciate the strong support from our federal partners and believe we'll continue to be successful because all stakeholders are working closely together to achieve success."

HHS Secretary Azar stated on this one-year anniversary of the administration's launch of the National Opioid Initiative, "Our strategy is beginning to produce results, thanks to so many Americans working on the ground, in their own communities, to turn the tide on this crisis."

The Hawai'i Opioid Initiative, a 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, 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.

“The Governor’s Opioid Initiative has brought coordinated programming and policy to a new level with stakeholders in the state, the community, and the federal government leveraging resources and collaborative efforts,” said Health Director Bruce Anderson. “This additional funding will enable us to continue to implement HHS’ comprehensive five-pronged strategy to address opioid misuse. With support from the Legislature, we will also be able to expand programs unique to Hawai'i. For example, we want to expand the Drop Box Program from police stations to pharmacies across the state to make it more convenient to safely dispose of unused prescription drugs, including opioids.”

Hawai'i's opioid death rates have historically been lower than the national rate, but through 2018, the incidence of drug related deaths in the state has surpassed traffic fatalities in Hawaii. Fortunately, death rates have declined since the Initiative was launched, with more than 120 overdose reversal from administration of Naloxone in the last year.

“We are very excited about the additional resources” said Eddie Mersereau, Deputy Director of Behavioral Health. “This grant has prompted us to not only look at how we deal with the opioid crisis but to look at how we are addressing substance abuse disorders across the board. The activities of the Hawai'i Opioid Initiative and this grant have sparked a restructuring of our substance abuse system of care and people will begin to see these positive changes over the next 6-8 months as we move toward a more effective and coordinated system.”

“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.”

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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.

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