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Hawai'i Opioid Initiative launches new opioid awareness campaign and online risk questionnaire

HONOLULU – Today, the Hawai'i Opioid Initiative (HOI) launched its opioid awareness campaign, which encourages adults to find out their risk for opioid dependence by answering a few easy questions at www.hawaiiopioid.org/. Advertisements will air on television and on digital platforms through Nov. 24. The HOI is a collaborative effort spearheaded by the Department of Health and includes participation from public health, public safety, healthcare professionals, and community partners.

“Many people don’t know that if you have been taking prescription opioid or narcotic pain medication for more than one week, you could be at risk for opioid *dependence** and not even know it,” said Director of Health Bruce Anderson. “Learning about the risk and about alternative treatment options is the first step to keeping you and your family safe.” Last year, approximately 650,000 prescriptions for opioid or narcotic pain medication were dispensed in Hawai'i.

**Dependence refers to physical responses to substances such as increased tolerance (needing more substance to achieve desired effect) and withdrawal (substance-specific symptoms when it is no longer taken). Although dependence does not necessarily constitute addiction, it can often accompany addiction.*

The online questionnaire was developed with the goal of providing useful online resources based on the individual's score. Based on the results, individuals will be referred to helpful information on safer ways to treat pain, how to prevent an overdose, and treatment options that are available in Hawai'i. By providing an optional email address, responses will be emailed to the individual to facilitate a conversation with a doctor or health care professional. All responses and email addresses are kept completely confidential.

“This campaign is one of many initiatives currently happening to curb opioid dependence in Hawai'i,” said Eddie Mersereau, Deputy Director of Behavioral Health Administration. “Future campaigns will hone-in on specific priority populations and subgroups who are most at risk of dependence and overdose.”

The HOI convenes seven workgroups to address issues related treatment access, prescriber education, data-informed decision-making, prevention and public education, pharmacy-based interventions, and support for law enforcement and first responders. Since the HOI was launched in 2017, there have been more than 120 overdose reversals from administration of Naloxone in the last year. Hawaii'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.

This Thursday, Aug. 29, the HOI and the Hawai'i Health and Harm Reduction Center will observe International Overdose Awareness Day to raise awareness of overdose and to reduce stigma of drug-related deaths. The event will take place at the Harris Methodist Church from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. A documentary commemorating 30 years of syringe exchange in Hawai'i will follow, and lunch will be served. This event is open to the public.

Visit www.hawaiiopioid.org/ take the opioid awareness questionnaire or to watch the public service announcement. For more information about the Awareness Day event, go to www.HHHRC.org.

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