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Community Members share Stories of Resilience in New Opioid Prevention Campaign

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Opioid Initiative (HOI) launched a new campaign this week for those struggling with opioid addiction and their family members. Advertisements will run on television, print, digital and social media outlets through the end of February.

The public service announcements feature personal stories from Gabe B. and Alberta S., who share what they've learned and overcome since their recovery from substance use disorder and direct people to HawaiiOpioid.org to view their full stories.

"If I could just help one family, it makes all the difference in the world," explains Alberta, who's story focuses on the toll her substance use took on her family members. "It robs you from being present in people's lives."

Campaign spots educate the public about the importance of locking up medications to protect loved ones, how carrying Naloxone can stop an overdose, information on managing physical and emotional pain safely, and how to get connected to substance use treatment services by calling Hawai'i C.A.R.E.S. (Coordinated Access Resource Entry System).

The stories were filmed as part of a digital storytelling workshop held by the Hawai'i Health and Harm Reduction Center and the Department of Health to help community members find healing by telling their stories. It was facilitated by people in recovery and provided a safe space to learn how to fight stigma by sharing their experience. More stories from additional community members will be added to the website and aired as public service announcements in the coming weeks.

The HOI is a group of stakeholders across the state who meet regularly to address substance use treatment access, prescriber education, data-informed decision-making, prevention and public education, pharmacy-based interventions, and support for law enforcement and first responders. While opioid overdose death rates in Hawai'i have declined since the inception of the HOI in 2017, the incidence of all drug-related deaths has far surpassed traffic fatalities. Preliminary data through September indicated that this trend continued into 2020.

"COVID-19 has already had a tremendous impact on our mental health and emotional well-being, and we're concerned that it will lead to increases in substance use and overdose," explains Eddie Mersereau, deputy director for the Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration. "This campaign informs people about the resources available to them and reminds people that it is okay to ask for help."

Individuals and their loved ones can contact Hawai'i C.A.R.E.S. to be connected to substance use treatment services in their area. Hawai'i C.A.R.E.S., formerly the Crisis Line of Hawai'i, also offers crisis support, mental health resources, and help with isolation and quarantine due to COVID-19.

“There’s people that are going to be there for you to lean on, people who are there just to be an open ear,” shares Gabe. “Make sure you reach out to them, and they’ll grab you as hard as they can.”

If you or someone you know needs to be connected to substance use treatment services, call Hawai'i C.A.R.E.S. at 1(800)753-6879 or text ALOHA to 741741. Watch Gabe and Alberta’s stories at [HawaiiOpioid.org](https://www.hawaiiopioid.org).

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