https://auburnpub.com/lifestyles/salvage-healing-cayuga-county-one-person-at-a-time/article_3e7e528b-54e0-5a96-81a5-8ef740c398df.html

DRUGS

# Salvage: Healing Cayuga County, one person at a time

Monika Salvage Special to The Citizen    Updated 4 hrs ago



Provided

People die from opioid poisoning. In fact, over 130 people die from it in this country every day. The sad reality is that overdose is now the leading cause of death for Americans under 50 and it has surpassed peak numbers of car crash, HIV and gun deaths per year. However, these are just numbers and statistics until it hits home, until it affects someone we know, until we have to bury someone we love.

The good news amid this tragedy is that addiction is treatable; people can recover from opioid use disorder. But we have to realize that just like with any other chronic disease, it is a long-term illness with no definite cure that requires ongoing medical care. There are no quick fixes, no shortcuts. But if we treat opioid use disorder the way we treat other diseases — with compassion and continuous care — we might just turn the tide. Let me tell you about a new countywide initiative, the HEALing Communities Study, that is looking to destigmatize and help people who suffer from opioid use disorder.

What is the HEALing Communities Study? HEAL stands for Helping to End Addiction Long-term. It is a multi-year, multi-state research study funded by the National Institute of Health through the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

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What is the goal? The primary goal is to reduce opioid overdose deaths by 40%.

What is the study approach? A community-driven approach to address the opioid epidemic by implementing evidence-based intervention practices will be applied and studied with the goal to develop a sustainable model that can be replicated in other communities.

What are evidence-based practices? Intervention practices that have been proven successful, such as education and stigma reduction, naloxone training and distribution, medication for addiction treatment and safer prescribing practices.

Who was invited to participate in this study? Communities with a higher than average opioid overdose death rate. Sixteen communities participate in New York state, part of a total of 67 communities in four states: New York, Massachusetts, Kentucky and Ohio. Communities in New York state will be working with Columbia University as their research partner.

Who is working on it locally? A growing steering committee of community stakeholders who are a point of contact for people with opioid use disorder — health, prevention, treatment, recovery service providers, peer advocates, law enforcement and others. The goal is to have as many stakeholders involved as possible from different areas of the county and with varying expertise and experiences. The steering committee will make decisions on the implementation of evidence-based practices in our community and will be supported by local staff.

How will progress be communicated? This is the first of a series of monthly columns that will keep the community informed about the work of the steering committee and partners involved. As we move into the implementation phase, many different outreach activities are planned through various channels. If you would like to receive periodic emails about the study and related topics, please send me an email and I'll add you to the email distribution list. In the near future, information will be posted on the Cayuga County website and you will be able to sign up for notifications there as well.

This was a quick introduction to a new approach with the goal to better integrate existing services and implement proven practices to reduce opioid deaths and ensure a continuum of care. Stay tuned for more news in the coming months and feel free to reach out with any feedback.

Monika Salvage works for the Cayuga County Mental Health Department as the project manager for the HEALing Communities Study. If you are interested in learning more or getting involved, call (315) 253-1522 or email **msalvage@cayugacounty.us**.