

**HEALing  
Communities  
Study**  

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**Cayuga County**

**Press Release 9/1/20**

**Campaign aims to remove stigma of medications for opioid use disorder**

The Cayuga County HEALing Communities Study steering committee is launching the “I am more” campaign that is focusing on the people suffering from opioid use disorder (OUD) instead of defining them solely by their disease. The campaign addresses stigma around medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) to combat the notion that this is merely “replacing one drug for another” and “not real recovery.” The digital and social media campaign on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) is complemented by print, bus, and banner advertising around the county and features a local person in recovery who now helps others on their recovery journey.

No matter who we are or where we come from, we all know at least one person who is affected by opioid use disorder. An estimated 2.1 million Americans have OUD. In Cayuga County, 16 fatal overdoses were reported so far this year, which is more than all of last year, and most of them were confirmed to be opioid-related. These individuals were someone’s child, grandchild, sibling, parent, or friend and they were struggling with opioid use disorder. They were likely to suffer, use, and die alone because of the stigma that is attached to this disease. And often, their families and loved ones suffer in isolation because of shame and embarrassment.

The good news is there are many proven ways to help people with OUD, including: opioid overdose education and naloxone distribution programs; strategies to reduce inappropriate opioid prescribing; FDA-approved medications for opioid use disorder including methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone; behavioral therapies; and recovery support services. Unfortunately, the stigmatization of people with OUD and their loved ones keeps many from accessing these practices.

Some gains have been made in reducing stigma around medical disorders. For instance, public education and widespread use of effective medications has demystified depression, making it somewhat less taboo now than it was in past generations. However, little progress has been made in removing the stigma around OUD. People with opioid use disorder continue to be blamed for their disorder. The public and even many professionals in the healthcare and criminal justice systems continue to view addiction as a result of moral weakness and flawed character. This keeps people with OUD from getting the best possible care and leads to overdose deaths.

What many don’t realize is that OUD is a medical disorder characterized by an inability to stop the use of an addictive substance, despite the negative consequences associated with its use. Addiction is a chronic

brain disease not a lack of willpower. More importantly, OUD is treatable and people who use medicines like buprenorphine (Suboxone®) and methadone are more likely to stay in recovery and enjoy healthy, productive lives.

Alleviating stigma is not easy. Change needs to come from all angles, which involves the hearts and minds of policy makers, the families of people with OUD, and healthcare professionals. There must be wider recognition that OUD is a disease, and that there are FDA-approved medications that can help. Everyone can make a difference by creating a stigma-free environment for people with OUD in your family, community, workplace, and/or health care setting. Stigma is not only in our minds, it is also in our words, which can be extremely hurtful. Words matter and using person-first language goes a long way to reducing stigma when talking about opioid use disorder. Learn more at

[www.HealTogetherNY.org/Cayuga](http://www.HealTogetherNY.org/Cayuga)

“The goal is to meet people where they are and provide them access to a variety of treatment options,” says **Ray Bizzari, Chair of the Cayuga County HEALing Communities Study Steering Committee and Director of Community Services for Cayuga County**. “We are working to remove barriers and expand access to MOUD to keep people alive.”

“Seeing people for more than their disease and treating them with dignity is crucial,” says **Monika Salvage, Project Director for the Cayuga County HEALing Communities Study**. “Next time you hear someone talk about an ‘addict,’ remind them that this could easily be their friend or family member one day.”

About the HEALing Communities Study

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) estimates that 2.1 million Americans have OUD, yet fewer than 20% of those individuals receive specialty care in a given year. A menu of evidence-based practices (EBPs) exists, including opioid overdose education and naloxone distribution programs, prescription drug monitoring programs, FDA-approved medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), behavioral therapies, and recovery support services. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) launched the HEALing Communities Study (HCS) to investigate and identify the EBPs for preventing and treating OUD that are most effective at the local level. The goal of the study is to reduce opioid-related overdose deaths by 40 percent over the course of three years.