

**COUNTYWIDE ALLIANCE FOR ENFORCEMENT AND
REHABILITATION**

2018 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Coordinator

Background

In January of 2018 County Executive George Borrello formed the Countywide Alliance for Enforcement and Rehabilitation (CAER) as a multi-disciplinary approach to address the opioid crisis. Borrello indicated he believed it was the job of the County Executive to oversee the process, break down the barriers that currently existed in eliminating the problem, and collectively establish goals and objectives, which he would personally monitor and oversee on the path to resolution.

Borrello believed a three-pronged approach consisting of law enforcement, prevention/education, and treatment, would be necessary to reverse the number of deaths which had been occurring in Chautauqua County. In order to effectively implement these concepts Borrello directed the CAER Task Force to include:

- Chautauqua County Law Enforcement
- Chautauqua County District Attorney's Office
- Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services
- Chautauqua County Department of Mental Hygiene
- Hospitals / Drug Treatment Clinics
- Peer Support Groups
- Advocacy Groups

During the first two months of 2018 the County Executive's Office contacted stakeholders from these organizations to determine their willingness to serve on the CAER Task Force. From those contacts two committees were formed; law enforcement and education/prevention/treatment.

Meetings with the two committees began taking place on a regular basis in March of 2018. This would be the first time that all of these stakeholders would not only meet together but also share information and initiate broad collaboration.

The following organization and individuals currently make up the CAER Task Force:

Law Enforcement Committee:

Chautauqua County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff Gerace)
Chautauqua County District Attorney's Office (Patrick Swanson)
Dunkirk Police Department (Chief David Ortolano)
Fredonia Police Department (Chief Brad Meyers)
Jamestown Police Department (Chief Harry Snellings)
New York State Police (Captain Eric Balon)
Chautauqua County Dept. of Health and Human Services (Christine Schuyler)
Chautauqua County Dept. of Health and Human Services (Breeanne Agett)

Education / Prevention /Treatment Committee:

Chautauqua Alcohol and Substance Abuse Council (Melanie Witkowski)
Chautauqua County Dept. of Health and Human Services (Christine Schuyler)
Chautauqua County Dept. of Health and Human Services (Breeanne Agett)
Chautauqua County Dept. of Mental Hygiene (Patricia Brinkman)
Dunkirk City School District (James Tracy)
Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES (David O'Rourke)
Fredonia School District (Jeffrey Sortisio)
Jamestown Public School District (Brett Apthorpe)
Jamestown Psychiatry (Julie Apperson)
Mental Health Association (Kia Narraway-Briggs)
Southwestern Central School District (Maureen Donahue)
TLC Health Network (Wendy Luce)
UPMC Chautauqua (Andy O'Brien)
Rick Huber
Dr. Lillian Ney

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

One of the immediate goals of the CAER Task Force was to determine the extent of the opioid and drug crisis in Chautauqua County. The only reliable statistical data available came from the Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services in terms of confirmed and pending deaths due to drug overdose. Within the current process, Chautauqua County receives certificates of death for statistical purposes for deaths that **occurred in** Chautauqua County. If a resident of Chautauqua County overdosed in our county, and was subsequently transported and died of a drug overdose in Erie County (New York), or in the state of Pennsylvania, the Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services would not receive a record of that death.

The following is statistical information for confirmed and pending drug deaths in Chautauqua County for the years 2015-2017:

- **2015-** (29) drug-related deaths, 23 drug overdose deaths, 0 pending investigations
- **2016-** (36) drug-related deaths, 33 drug overdose deaths, 0 pending investigations
- **2017-** (42) drug-related deaths, 38 drug overdose deaths, 1 pending investigation as of October 11, 2018

Overdose deaths are those that have listed an acute intoxication by stated or unstated drug. This also includes positional asphyxia due to drug intoxication.

Drug related deaths include deaths that occurred with chronic or past drug use listed as a contributing factor to the death.

As Chautauqua County does not have a Medical Examiner's Office, the Erie County (NY) Medical Examiner's Office conducts autopsies as necessary and, largely due to the opioid epidemic they currently have a backlog of cases to complete and report which account for the "pending investigations" referenced in this report.

We are pleased to report that in its first year of existence the CAER Task Force has seen a downward shift in the number of deaths. In fact, for the first time in at least four years, Chautauqua County is experiencing a decline in drug overdose and drug-related deaths.

During the first three quarters of 2017, we experienced 29 drug overdose and 32 drug-related deaths. **To date**, we have confirmation there were 10 drug overdose and 13 drug-related deaths through September of 2018. **Depending on the results of pending investigations, we project that drug overdoses have declined as much as 65.5%. Drug-related deaths are as much as 59.4% lower than similar data from 2017.**

As part of initiating improvements to better determine the extent of the overall drug problem in Chautauqua County, we implemented the ODMAP Program in June of 2018. This program will show "real time" overdose data in our county, and can now assist us in responding to overdose trends. Training was conducted by the Chautauqua County Sheriff's Office and the Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services in conjunction with the New York / New Jersey HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) so our first responders who respond to an overdose can register the overdose at the scene via their mobile data terminal.

We want to extend our thanks and appreciation to Breeanne Agett of the Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services and Undersheriff Charles Holder of the Chautauqua County Sheriff's Office for making the ODMAP program a reality in Chautauqua County.

While we have seen some initial success as a result of the collective work of the two CAER Task Force committees in 2018, ultimately our goal should be to continue to reduce the number of deaths in the ensuing years, provide treatment and educational opportunities to reduce the number of county residents addicted to drugs, reduce the amount of drug-related crime, and prevent our children from ever using narcotics.

As such, we respectfully make the following recommendations to the County Executive for 2019:

- **Combine the Southern Tier Regional Drug Task Force (STRDTF) and the Jamestown Metro Drug Task Force.** In a county this size having two drug

task forces is not the most efficient or effective tool to conduct narcotic investigations. While law enforcement intelligence information relayed during the course of CAER Task Force meetings needs to remain confidential, it is abundantly clear that narcotics sales in Chautauqua County do not confine themselves to city borders, and it is imperative that we have a single, unified narcotics task force consisting of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies sharing information and working together to arrest drug dealers. Based on statistical information reviewed by CAER there are growing concerns about areas under the jurisdiction of the STRDTF including the city of Dunkirk and the Village of Fredonia. While a united group is our preference, if a single narcotics task force cannot be formed to serve the entire county other measures will need to be implemented to address developing North County issues.

- **Add a Full-time Investigators position to the District Attorney's Office.**
To effectively prosecute narcotics cases there needs to be close communication and coordination between the county's law enforcement agencies and the District Attorney's Office. The District Attorney will be adding a full-time narcotics prosecutor to his office. Without the services of a full-time investigator to assist the prosecutor they are going to quickly find themselves overwhelmed by the workload. When that happens the quality of prosecutions deteriorates, and drug dealers can avoid prosecution and continue to endanger communities. Despite all of the overdose deaths that have occurred since 2015 in this county, the Chautauqua County District Attorney's Office has never prosecuted any defendant for a manslaughter or homicide charge related to a drug death. While there are multiple reasons why this is occurring, those deficiencies can be significantly resolved by having a specialized narcotics investigator in the District Attorney's Office who can respond to the scene of an overdose death to ensure that proper evidence is being collected and critical witnesses are being interviewed. Drug dealers have gotten away with murder in Chautauqua County, and if we ever intend to hold them accountable and send a message to other dealers, we need to make sure a properly trained and experienced investigator is engaged with the investigation immediately following the discovery of a body.
- **Transfer the duties of the "Chautauqua County Department of Mental Hygiene" to the Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services. Rename the Department of Mental Hygiene "Chautauqua County Community Services" and take the current director of the Department of Mental Hygiene and reclassify her as the "Deputy Commissioner of Community Services."** Much like the need for one law enforcement narcotics task force in Chautauqua County we need one county health department working in the same chain of command to address the myriad of health and social issues which spin-off of narcotics issues. With one unified health department working in concert, the delivery of services will be more efficient, and confusion about the role of two different departments working on the same issue can be eliminated.

We have seen instances where treatment is delayed because there is not a clear understanding of where to get information and help. This unified department can now take a more holistic approach to health services and can engage more efficiently with private treatment providers and organizations such as the Chautauqua Alcohol and Substance Abuse Council (CASAC), and the Mental Health Association (MHA). Once this unification is complete the more appropriately titled “**Chautauqua County Community Services**” can address the following critical needs:

- o Much work remains to be done with the county’s school districts and the communities they serve to engage them with programming to steer school-aged children away from drugs. CASAC has done excellent work to this point, but they need support from the county to publicize the benefits of this programming.
- o There are too many pregnant mothers who are giving birth to children who are testing positive for narcotics in their systems. The newly formed “Community Services” Department can work together with other members of the Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services using the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Planning Grant from the United States Department of Health and Human Services to address this expanding problem.
- o Work with the Chautauqua County Sheriff’s Office to fully implement a drug treatment Pod in the county jail.
- o Create a pilot program that has peer counselors follow up with individuals who have been rescued with Naloxone (aka Narcan) by law enforcement and other first responders, and immediately connect them to treatment.
- **Begin the process to research the potential to open a Crime Lab in Chautauqua County serving the Southern Tier of New York and areas within the State of Pennsylvania.** While Chautauqua County is a rural area it is not immune from major crime. As indicated earlier in this report there are serious crimes escaping prosecution in this county, and the need for a crime lab in this county to provide timely evidence analysis is quickly becoming necessary. A partnership to house the Crime Lab at the State University of New York at Fredonia should also be explored.
- **Enter into an agreement with the Erie County (Pennsylvania) Coroner’s Office to share information concerning autopsy results of Chautauqua County residents who die in Erie PA area hospitals.** With area hospitals

now affiliated with larger parent facilities in Pennsylvania, it is common for victims of drug overdoses to be transferred to Erie, Pennsylvania, where if they die information concerning their death is not routinely shared with Chautauqua County. This hampers any potential criminal case against the person who supplied the victim with drugs.

CONCLUSION:

These recommendations are not all-inclusive of where we need to improve as a county to reduce drug usage, drug-related crime, and prevent future deaths. However, they do represent the most pressing needs if our goal is to continue a downward trend in deaths and crime caused by those caught in the drug cycle. In some of the recommendations there are significant costs which hopefully can be mitigated by state and federal grants. In other recommendations there are potential cost savings. However, if we don't move rapidly to address potential solutions through a coordinated and collaborative approach, our taxpayers will likely incur substantial costs related to the county's criminal justice system.