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Northampton Awarded IT Grant to Develop Regional Opioid Database

Today, Mayor David J. Narkewicz announced that the City of Northampton Health Department received a \$100,000 grant from the Community Compact Information Technology (IT) Grant Program. Northampton was one of 45 cities and towns across the Commonwealth awarded this grant, dedicated to fund technology improvements that help drive innovation and transformation, and enhance service at the local level. In combination with a recently awarded Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) grant the Health Department will develop a regional data collection system that will support the work of Hampshire HOPE, which is Hampshire County's heroin and opioid abuse prevention coalition run out of the Northampton Health Department.

Currently, there are few data sources that allow us to look at the local level impact of opioid use disorder- such as rates of current use, overdose, and treatment or recovery. Having one centralized data system for healthcare organizations and emergency responders, supplemented with relevant data sets derived from state or federal sources, such as US Census, MA State Police, MA Registry of Vital Records Death Certificate data, as well as other public health data from various sources will allow for more timely data and a more robust understanding the scope of opioid problem.

“Having this information is vital for Hampshire HOPE when deciding the next steps the coalition will take for addressing this issue in our community,” stated Mayor Narkewicz, “The data will be used to inform and enhance coordination of programs and community wide efforts, as well as evaluate current efforts.”

“This database will enhance the work of Hampshire HOPE by creating a more timely and accurate system for communities to track fatal and non-fatal overdose trends in the region, as well as supporting and evaluating the work of the Drug Addiction and Recovery Team (DART),” notes Merridith O’Leary, Director of the Health Department. DART is a regional program recently developed to provide post-overdose support to individuals and their families through teams of trained recovery coaches and police officers.

Documenting outreach to people who have experienced an overdose is one of the most important components of this project. “This grant is important for us to effectively communicate within DART and to evaluate our programs success”, says J. Cherry Sullivan, Hampshire HOPE’s program coordinator. “In fact, without a comprehensive tracking system

that is more timely and accurate than our current data collection capacity, we can't stay ahead of the trends during this time of high concern in our community. In fact, having real time data allows us to better respond to upticks in overdoses by spreading word about potentially higher risk batches of heroin or illicitly manufactured pills.”

Hampshire HOPE has taken a strong leadership role in convening key sectors to address the opioid crisis the overdose death rate continues to rise in Hampshire County. The region has been challenged by an increase in potent analogues of fentanyl in drugs, which contributes to the rising death rate. With the risk of illicit fentanyl and aforementioned risk factors, there is a clear need to build upon our existing infrastructure to enhance the availability of Naloxone, track Naloxone disbursements and Naloxone related trainings to first responders and other key community sectors that are potential bystanders to an opioid overdose.

Overall, this data can help tell a story of how individuals in our community are navigating through the treatment system and what seems to work best for them, all while reducing the cost burden by creating a regional database and a shared approach. The City has contracted with Ready EDI and Associates to develop this system and expect it to be operational by spring, 2019.