



CHESTER COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

TELEPHONE: 610-344-6801
FAX: 610-344-5905

THOMAS P. HOGAN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

201 W. MARKET STREET, SUITE 4450
POST OFFICE BOX 2748
WEST CHESTER, PA 19380-0991

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PRESS RELEASE

**The Opioid Crisis:
A Snapshot of Chester County**

The Chester County District Attorney's Office has received completed figures for the amount of drugs taken off the street through Chester County's medication collection box program in 2017. With the release of those figures, this is also a good time to review where Chester County stands in the national opioid crisis.

Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan stated, "The national opioid crisis is affecting people from all walks of life. In Chester County, we are fortunate to have the resources to stay on the cutting edge of the fight against this epidemic, using multiple tactics to protect our citizens and showing the way for areas that do not have our tools. The bad news is that this battle will continue for a substantial period of time. The good news is that we are beginning to see the tide turning in our favor, and we are making substantial progress in this national health emergency."

Chester County Commissioner Chair Michelle Kichline added, "The Chester County Commissioners are dedicated to doing everything possible to create a safe environment for the good people of Chester County. The opioid epidemic has hit young and old, rich and poor, touching everybody. We will carry on, working with the District Attorney, our Health Department, the Department of Drug & Alcohol Services, hospitals and many, many other partners because it is the only way we will win this battle."

A. Medication Collection Boxes

The drug disposal box program was started in 2014 by the Chester County District Attorney’s Office, the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association, and Chester County police departments. The boxes allow citizens to dispose of drugs in a safe manner, simply dropping the drugs into the locked boxes for later disposal by law enforcement. The destruction of these drugs keeps dangerous opioids from falling into the hands of addicts or children, as well as making sure that the drugs are not dumped into the drinking water system.



Drug Drop Box

In 2017, Chester County collected and disposed of over 10,000 pounds of unwanted medication. That is over five tons of drugs that have been taken off the street. Every year, the amount of drugs recovered through the drop box program has increased.

Year	Drugs Collected
2014	1,392 lbs.
2015	2,967 lbs.
2016	8,073 lbs.
2017	10,045 lbs.

Vince Brown, the Executive Director of Chester County Drug & Alcohol Services, stated, “The drug drop box program has been a tremendous tool in our

efforts to address the opioid crisis. The boxes have provided a local and safe way to easily dispose of medications, which has eliminated an enormous amount of potentially dangerous drugs from circulation.”

The drug drop boxes are located at police departments and other secure locations across Chester County. A full list of the locations can be found at this link <http://www.chesco.org/2673/Medication-Drop-Off> and also is attached at the end of this release.

B. Narcan Saves

Another facet of the Chester County strategy to fight the opioid epidemic is the use of naloxone, brand name Narcan. Narcan is an opioid antagonist, which means that it blocks the brain’s receptors for opioids. Simply put, when administered to a person who is overdosing on heroin or opioids, Narcan reverses the overdose and stops the drugs from killing the person.

Narcan is administered in a simple nasal spray. Every police department in Chester County now carries Narcan. In 2017 alone, there were 189 Narcan administrations by Chester County law enforcement.

Chester County Commissioner Kathi Cozzone stated, “Every successful Narcan administration is another life saved. And every life saved is a chance for a young person to get into treatment, break their addiction, and live a full and rewarding life.”



Narcan Dose

C. Overdose Prevention Task Force

Chester County decided early in the opioid epidemic to take a multi-disciplinary approach to the issue, creating an Overdose Prevention Task Force to coordinate activities. The Task Force is led by the District Attorney's Office, the Department of Drug & Alcohol, and the Department of Health. The Task Force includes over 50 other organizations and stakeholders who are involved in the systemic fight against the opioid scourge.

The Task Force engages in multiple activities to address the problem. The Task Force helps to educate students through the Narcotics Overdose Prevention & Education program, doing presentations with Holcomb Behavioral Health at schools across Chester County. The Task Force has worked to educate doctors about overprescribing opioids, resulting in the Chester County physicians becoming a leading voice for reform of opioid prescribing practices. The Task Force is working on a "warm hand-off" project, where overdose victims are guided into treatment. The Task Force has established a website (<https://stopodchesco.org>) as a convenient location to get information on this epidemic. These and many other programs are worked on every day in Chester County.

Chester County also employs other strategies to fight opioids. With prosecutions like Operation Wildfire, the District Attorney's Office has targeted heroin and opioid dealers. Chester County has one of the longest tenured drug courts in Pennsylvania, diverting addicts from the prison system.

Commissioner Terence Farrell stated, "Chester County uses every tool at our disposal to fight the opioid epidemic. But we know that we need a balanced approach. We need to cut off the supply by locking up dealers. We also need to divert addicts from jail and get them into treatment."

D. Overall View

There is good news and bad news about the opioid epidemic.

The most obvious good news is that the number of opioid prescriptions across the United States is now decreasing. After two decades of explosive growth in opioid prescriptions, the number of prescriptions and number of pills prescribed per prescription both are declining, as doctors realize the dangers of these drugs.

The bad news about the opioid epidemic is directly related to the good news. As doctors are prescribing fewer opioids, some patients are turning to cheaper

alternatives like heroin. Heroin from Philadelphia is the cheapest and purest heroin in the United States, and often is spiked with deadly fentanyl. Virtually all across the United States, there are increased overdose deaths. In the last 20 years, over 500,000 people in the United States have died from drug overdoses; some experts are estimating that the nation will lose another 500,000 people just in the next 10 years as the country emerges from the opioid epidemic.

Overall, the tide is turning in this battle. The general public, physicians, and politicians are now aware of the dangers of opioids and heroin. With this knowledge, opioid prescriptions are being cut back to appropriate uses, such as immediately after major surgeries and with end-stage cancer pain. Ironically, one of the best signals law enforcement has that heroin use is starting a long-term decline is the fact that international drug trafficking organizations are now increasing their production of cocaine, anticipating a fall in the demand for heroin.

District Attorney Hogan added, “Chester County will keep using its considerable resources and leadership to fight the opioid epidemic. The county will continue to see the impact of this health crisis for years. However, working together, we will save every life we can. And, at last, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for this problem.”

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Approved for release:

Thomas P. Hogan

Caln Township
Police Department
253 Municipal Drive
Thorndale, PA 19320

City of Coatesville
Police Department
1 City Hall
Coatesville, PA 19320

East Brandywine Twp.
Police Department
1212 Horseshoe Pike
Downingtown, PA 19335

East Whiteland Township
Police Department
209 Conestoga Road
Malvern, PA 19355

Easttown Township
Police Department
566 Beaumont Road
Devon, PA 19333

Kennett Square Borough
Police Department
115 N. Broad Street
Kennett Square, PA 19348

North Coventry Township
Police Department
845 South Hanover Street
Pottstown, PA 19464

Oxford Borough
Police Department
57 N. Fourth Street
Oxford, PA 19363

Paoli Hospital
255 West Lancaster Ave.
Paoli, PA 19301

Parkesburg Borough
Police Department
315 W. First Ave., Bldg. 2
Parkesburg, PA 19365

Pennsylvania State Police
2 Moxley Lane
Avondale, PA 19311

Phoenixville Borough
Police Department
351 Bridge Street
Phoenixville, PA 19460

Sheriff's Office
Chester County Justice Ctr.
201 W. Market Street
West Chester, PA 19380

Southern Chester County
Regional Police Department
384 Starr Road, Suite 100
Landenberg, PA 19350

Tredyffrin Township
Police Department
1100 DuPortail Road
Berwyn, PA 19312

Upper Uwchlan Township
Police Department
140 Pottstown Pike
Chester Springs, PA 19425

Valley Township
Police Department
890 W. Lincoln Highway
Coatesville, PA 19320

West Brandywine Twp.
Police Department
198 Lafayette Road
Coatesville, PA 19320

West Caln Township
Police Department
721 W Kings Highway
Coatesville, PA 19320

West Chester University
Police Department
690 South Church Street
West Chester PA 19383

West Goshen Township
Police Department
1025 Paoli Pike
West Chester, PA 19382

West Vincent Township
Police Department
729 St. Matthews Road
Chester Springs, PA 19425

West Whiteland Township
Police Department
101 Commerce Drive
Exton, PA 19341

Westtown-East Goshen
Regional Police Department
1041 Wilmington Pike
West Chester, PA 19382

Willistown Township
Police Department
688 Sugartown Road
Malvern, PA 19355