

## Press release

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In response to Alaska's heroin epidemic and communities' call for action heard across the state, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, and Alaska Department of Health and Social Services are convening the Alaska Opioid Policy Task Force. This task force of Alaskan experts will work collaboratively with stakeholders and coalitions statewide.

On or before Nov. 30, 2016, the Alaska Opioid Policy Task Force will recommend strategies and policies to the Governor and Legislature to address the rising incidence of heroin use, prescription opioid abuse, and deaths due to opioid overdose. Recommendations will be evidence and research-based and reflect best practices, where applicable. The Alaska Opioid Policy Task Force will address:

- a) Alaska law enforcement efforts to curb the importation of heroin into the state;
- b) Prescribing practices related to pain management and opioid medications;
- c) Insurance and Medicaid roles in preventing and managing opioid addiction;
- d) Access to detox services;
- e) Prescription opioid drug misuse, diversion, and abuse;
- f) Improving the opioid treatment system in Alaska;
- g) Potential collateral public health concerns of opioid abuse and self-injecting drug use (Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, HIV, Hepatitis, etc);
- h) Harm reduction practices (e.g., access to naloxone, syringe and needle exchange programs);
- i) Public education and destigmatization;
- j) Root causes of self-medication;
- k) Any potential collateral consequences of policies considered by the task force; and
- l) Other areas identified by stakeholders throughout the process.

The most effective responses to Alaska's heroin and opioid epidemic will be tailored to meet the needs of rural and urban communities and the diverse cultures of Alaska. The task force will coordinate efforts with local community-driven coalitions in order to develop recommendations that are relevant statewide.

The Alaska Opioid Policy Task Force will be comprised of twenty members, representing people in recovery from opioid addiction and their families, the public health system, the behavioral health system, law enforcement, emergency medical responders, pharmacists, and others, with *ex officio* members invited from the Governor's Office and the Alaska Legislature.

The Alaska Opioid Policy Task Force meetings will be open to the public. Participation from community substance abuse prevention and wellness coalitions, as well as other interested stakeholders, will be actively solicited and included in the task force's work. Information about the task force, its work, and the impact of opioid misuse and abuse is available on the AOPTF website (<http://dhss.alaska.gov/AKOpioidTaskForce/>), Facebook, and Twitter (@AKOpioidPolicy).