

## Blueprint to Address Heroin Dependency

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Heroin and opiate addiction is in crisis in New Castle County. Overdoses are killing our family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors and tearing apart communities. New Castle County Paramedics and EMT services treat more than two heroin overdoses daily. The rate of overdose deaths in the county equals the 9<sup>th</sup> highest statewide rate in the country. In New Castle County, the rate has tripled in the last five years. Last year, even the White House recognized the urgency of the epidemic here, designating New Castle County as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

And the crisis goes beyond the individuals facing addiction. Immediate and extended families are impacted and children of those facing addiction face particular harm. The treatment of children of those facing addiction stretches our social services and foster care systems to their limits.

From Claymont to New Castle to Middletown, from Bear to Wilmington to Pike Creek, the problem is everywhere. A crisis on this scale requires a coordinated public policy response, including extensive collaboration across government agencies, among different governments and between the public sector and private sector. Heroin is now “more plentiful, purer and cheaper than ever before,” according to recent News Journal reporting. Meanwhile, treatment resources are scarce and inadequate, and the quality of care is lacking. As the News Journal stated: “The standard of care is substandard across the country, but in Delaware it is especially so.”

*“No one sets out to be a heroin addict. It’s not a lifestyle choice.”*

*- Janice*

*Middletown, New Jersey*

Emergencies call for swift, immediate and decisive action. And yet, our county’s leadership has been taking slow, incremental action to address the problem, without addressing the roots of the problem. This is not sufficient, and it is not acceptable.

This policy presents the most comprehensive effort to address our county’s heroin and opiate crisis. It is a first step.

### **Policy Planning**

The state’s Drug Overdose Fatality Review Commission is a good start. We need to go further, with a cross-jurisdictional task force to examine how the state, the county and municipalities can effectively partner with private sector organizations, including treatment providers, hospitals, physicians, support groups, schools and colleges to have the highest quality prevention, treatment, harm reduction and emergency services.

This task force should move quickly to make both short-term and long-term recommendations for action. Time is of the essence, and we must all work together to resolve the heroin crisis.

The Governor of Massachusetts recently declared a public health emergency in response to the heroin crisis in that state. That allowed Massachusetts to immediately direct more resources and funding toward addressing that state's heroin problem. It is a drastic measure, but this is a drastic problem, and we should consider taking similar action here in Delaware.

We also will explore social impact bonds and pay for success financing structures as a means to seek private funding to fund data-driven pilot programs to reduce drug overdoses.

On the county level, we must take action to implement some common sense measures to begin solving this terrible epidemic and also to address the stigma associated with addiction. Addiction is a disease requiring treatment.

### **Treatment and Intervention**

We will propose the following policies with regard to treatment and intervention:

- We will immediately bring together federal, state, county and local officials and private and non-private partners, to pool together millions of dollars to mobilize every necessary resource to rescue county residents most threatened by addiction.
- We will collaborate with the state and private and non-profit partners to disseminate information more efficiently concerning treatment availability. The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services produces frequent reports regarding the number of beds available for treatment. In many instances there are open beds. The problem is getting the word out to those who need detox and those seeking short-term treatment. We will seek to identify any waiting periods for treatment beds and develop collaborative programs to eliminate any waiting periods.
- We will collaborate with the state and private and non-profit partners to enhance the network of sober living houses, particularly with respect to houses that allow those in recovery to accept and be on medically assisted treatment (MAT). Oxford House currently does some extraordinary work. Those on MAT need sober living house options in state as well.
- We will collaborate with the state and private and non-private partners to enhance post-treatment programs and support. We will work to enhance post-treatment options beyond Al Anon and NarAnon.

When elected officials believe there is an emergency, they find whatever resources are necessary to immediately address the problem. When DuPont announced that it intended to merge with Dow, state and county officials rapidly found \$20.7 million to incentivize the merged company to stay. When

politically-connected individuals wanted to start a new business, a stock exchange in Wilmington, the county government found \$3 million of park funds for them.

Our county officials do not have the same sense of urgency about treatment and intervention of overdoses. With DowDuPont, valuable jobs are on the line. With heroin, it is the lives of our family, friends and neighbors. Political leaders often claim to prioritize interventions to attack addiction but often do not support those claims with sufficient financial resources.

As one precious life after another is lost, elected officials are not stepping up to dedicate the resources that are needed to address this horrific scourge.

The result of this lack of urgency by our elected officials is that New Castle County still has woefully inadequate facilities, resources and capacity for drug treatment. Many voters have spoken with me about drug rehabilitation in New Castle County. Those who have been through the rehabilitation continuum of care report that it is inadequate and generally ineffective. Many providers cannot afford to provide known effective treatment options, such as medication-assisted treatment. The funds are simply not there.

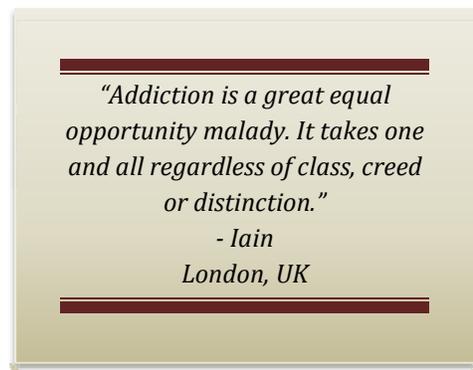
It often takes weeks or even months to get access to treatment. What most families know is a delay of even a few days could cost an individual his or her life. There are short windows of amenability. An individual receptive to treatment is not likely to stay that way for long. An individual who agrees to be admitted to a treatment facility may fall deeper into addiction within days and subsequently refuse admission. Those struggling with addiction often fluctuate in their decision to receive treatment, and if they don't get a bed as soon as they reach out for help, it is likely that it will be a long time before they are willing to try again.

Numerous families have also told me that county residents who get access to this deficient treatment system are the lucky ones. Many county residents cannot access *any* treatment. There is insufficient treatment capacity to meet the current need, and this treatment shortage is only getting worse, with increasing cases and the recent closure of Crossroads. As a result, many leave the state to seek treatment. But that is expensive, and many county residents cannot afford to go elsewhere. Many in desperate need of help simply cannot get it. Additional in-state treatment programs will also create jobs.

But even for the fortunate individuals who eventually manage to get access to treatment, they must still wait for days, weeks, or even months, for space to open up.

Our county's inadequate, underfunded and overwhelmed drug treatment system costs lives.

For example, President Obama recently proposed \$1.1 billion in funding for heroin and opioid addiction treatment. While the level of federal funding to be approved is not known, state, county and local



officials must collaborate to aggressively pursue these funds. An effective, collaborative approach will result in higher quality services for families and communities facing addiction.

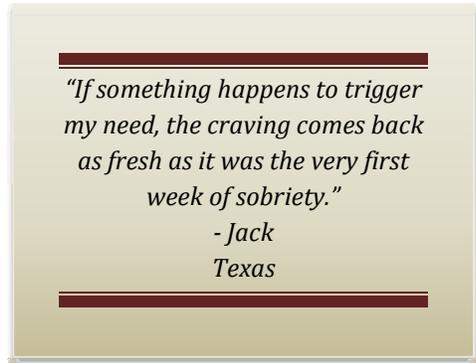
In addition to federal funding, we will prioritize the allocation of county funds to address this epidemic. Our operating budget is an articulation of our values, and voters have made it clear to me throughout this campaign that attacking addiction must be among our top priorities, and we will do so in collaboration with state and local officials.

We also will collaborate with our non-profit leaders to pursue public-private partnerships and other creative funding strategies outside of government to address this epidemic at its roots. For example, we will work with private sector leaders to design a social impact bond funding structure that should create a data driven approach to attacking addiction.

### **Enhancing Hero Help**

We will collaborate with state and local governments to improve the New Castle County Police Department's recently launched Hero Help program.

Hero Help is a step in the right direction. But it is a small step that does not go far enough towards addressing addiction. Unlike the Massachusetts program upon which it is based, our Hero Help program



*"If something happens to trigger my need, the craving comes back as fresh as it was the very first week of sobriety."*

*- Jack  
Texas*

provides no new funding or resources. Hero Help reallocates 10 treatment facility beds which were already available and in use. The leader of a local drug treatment facility recently commented that the Hero Help program is at best a "short-term intervention, and this is not a short-term problem." We must do better.

In contrast to New Castle County, the Massachusetts program uses drug seizure money to fund addiction treatment for people who participate in its program. In New Castle County, drug seizure funds are transferred to the statewide Special Law Enforcement Assistance Fund (SLEAF), which is allocated to police agencies throughout the state for law enforcement purposes. We will collaborate with law enforcement agencies to potentially allocate some of those SLEAF funds to drug treatment. We should strongly consider using funds seized from drug distributors, who illegally acquired the funds from drug users, for treating those users.

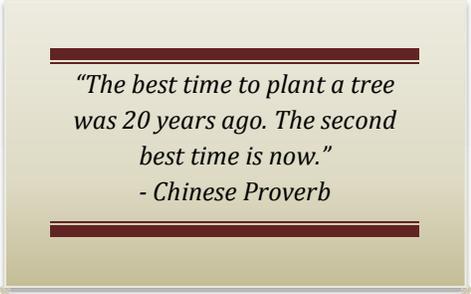
In addition, we should consider expanding Hero Help, like the Massachusetts program, to include additional volunteer manpower. The Massachusetts program effectively uses volunteers who serve as "angels," counselors who assist help seekers to find proper treatment. New Castle County decided not to use volunteers due to liability concerns and an unwillingness to screen volunteers. In fact, in the recently announced Dover, Delaware program, they will be using volunteer "angels." We should too.

## Harm Reduction

In addition to providing better treatment to individuals who are suffering from addiction, we must also focus on harm reduction. That is, we must take action to prevent heroin users from suffering catastrophic health consequences or death as a result of heroin use. Harm reduction measures do not cure addiction, but they save lives and prevent users from developing additional serious health problems.

We will seek to reduce harm by collaborating with other governing entities and private partners to enact the following policies:

- Increase the availability of Naloxone among family and friends of individuals suffering from heroin addiction. All county paramedics and police officers now carry Naloxone. Family and friends should not have to wait for first responders to arrive with Naloxone when that wait could cost loved ones dearly. We should understand the barriers to more widespread availability of Naloxone among family and friends and we should work to eliminate those barriers. We will work to create a permanent sustainable fund for Naloxone and Naltrexone for the community and law enforcement.
- The county should work with state officials to make Naloxone available without a prescription. Today, 35 states allow pharmacies to offer Naloxone without a prescription. Our administration will advocate for this legislative change and encourage the state legislature to introduce and pass this change.
- The county should collaborate with the state to better train the community on the usage and administration of Naloxone. The state offers training sessions. The county should promote and increase awareness of these trainings and encourage the friends and family of at-risk individuals to attend them. There needs to be greater awareness of the statewide program that enables individual citizens to train the community.
- The county government will collaborate with the Department of Public Health for a clean needle program and to establish Syringe Exchange Programs (SEPs) throughout the county, as is now required by state law. Making SEPS more widely available will result in injection drug users coming into more frequent contact with treatment centers, where the users can be educated about treatment options and be encouraged to seek treatment.



*"The best time to plant a tree  
was 20 years ago. The second  
best time is now."  
- Chinese Proverb*

## Prevention

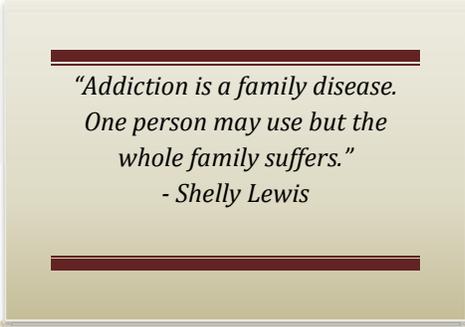
There are several steps we should take to improve our prevention efforts:

- We need to do better educating youth about the dangers of heroin and prescription opiates. We will do so by introducing evidence-based prevention programs, such as LifeSkills Training, the Blues Program, Positive Action, and the Project Towards No Drug Abuse.
- We will collaborate with statewide officials, Hope Street and atTAcK addiction to incorporate creative heroin education and prevention programs in every public junior high school and high school in New Castle County.
- We need to collaborate with state government officials and the private sector to increase the availability of medicinal marijuana and educate the community on the use of medicinal marijuana in certain cases as an effective alternative to prescription opiates.

Thus far, the county's prevention efforts have been centered around NCC Police Department-led programs, The Heroin Alert and The Heroin Trap. The Heroin Trap is a campaign that uses scare tactics to persuade youth to avoid heroin. A number of NCCPD officials are working hard to scare potential users away from heroin, and their service to the county is valuable.

What youth tell our campaign and what studies show is we need more than graphic commercials, pamphlets and presentations to convince young people to change their lifestyle and attitude. Moreover,

The Heroin Trap, while warning against the dangers of trying heroin, does little to warn young people about prescription opiates, which tend to be the gateway to heroin addiction.



*"Addiction is a family disease.  
One person may use but the  
whole family suffers."  
- Shelly Lewis*

Furthermore, the Heroin Trap unfortunately has the unintended consequence of stigmatizing people suffering from addiction. The message it promotes is that anyone who tries heroin once is a completely lost cause. They enter into an irreversible downward spiral of excessive drug use, stealing, violence, vagrancy, and even prostitution. This stigmatizes

those suffering from addiction who are trying to rehabilitate and who need the support and love of others. The Heroin Trap brands these individuals as hopeless, dangerous criminals.

Instead of focusing on sensational media campaigns, our county and state need to invest in tested, evidence-based prevention programs. There are a number of nationally recognized prevention programs that substantially reduce illegal drug use and addiction among youths.

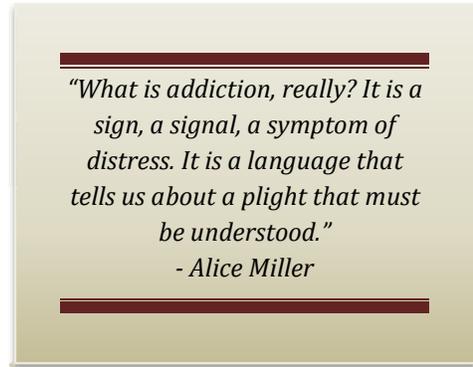
The common thread among these effective programs is that they help young people deal with negative cognitions, manage their emotions, and learn social skills. In other words, effective programs keep kids away from drugs by addressing their holistic mental health.

The county needs to collaborate with the state and local governments, schools, and non-profits to ensure that all young people in New Castle County are able to experience helpful, evidence-based drug prevention programming.

In order to prevent heroin use, we must also focus on prescription opiates. Heroin users often get hooked on opiates through prescription painkillers. Prescription painkillers are dangerous, and they often result in the patient becoming addicted. Once the user can no longer obtain their prescription legally, they often turn to street heroin as a substitute.

We therefore need to ensure that patients have access to less dangerous pain relief. Medicinal marijuana is known to be very effective at relieving pain. And it is far less addictive, has far fewer side effects, and cannot cause a fatal overdose. New Castle County needs to encourage the opening of additional medicinal marijuana dispensaries in order to make it more available to ailing residents who are in need of it. Moreover, we need to encourage the state legislature to expand the list of conditions for which it can be prescribed.

Finally, we need to spread awareness among physicians about medicinal marijuana, and encourage physicians consider prescribing medicinal marijuana in place of opiates when it is medically appropriate to do so.



### **Enforcement**

We will:

- More actively support information sharing and pooled resources to fight the trafficking of opiates, improving communication, intelligence sharing and coordination of activities through the Philadelphia-Camden High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program.
- Allocate more police resources to break the heroin trade, focusing on high-level traffickers rather than low-level dealers and users.
- Attempt to channel arrested users towards treatment rather than incarceration. We need to make sure that those seeking help are not punished for doing so.

The New Castle County Chief of Police has admitted that our county is “awash with heroin.” Drug traffickers continue to successfully transport massive amounts of heroin into the state from Philadelphia, Chester, and New York. As a result, the drug is widely available, cheap, and potent.

This must stop. New Castle County must do a better job of tracking down and arresting major heroin traffickers and distributors. This can be done by working together with other police departments and pooling together resources and manpower to aggressively pursue these individuals and groups.

In fact, this has been done in the past. The State Police and County Police previously operated a joint drug unit. There is no good reason that we cannot bring back that kind of collaboration, especially given the urgency of our county’s heroin problem.

Continuing to arrest individuals for dealing small amounts of heroin will likely do very little to disrupt the flow of heroin into the state. Arresting users generally will not cause them to stop buying drugs, since it does nothing to solve their addiction.

Targeting big-time traffickers and distributors will disrupt the heroin market and likely make heroin more difficult to obtain. That should be the focus of our county's police efforts with regard to heroin.

Finally, the Hero Help program may be of use to some individuals suffering from addiction, but it is only for people who bring themselves to the police voluntarily. Individuals caught with a bag of heroin in their pocket or their car will still be cuffed, fingerprinted and charged.

*"The mentality and behavior of drug addicts is wholly irrational until you understand that they are completely powerless over their addiction and unless they have structured help, they have no hope."  
- Russell Brand*

A more effective and cost-efficient policy would divert these individuals to treatment at the time of arrest. Many jurisdictions throughout the country are implementing Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs. LEAD programs allow police to use discretion to forgo arrest and instead direct users to drug and mental health treatment, as well as other rehabilitative and support services.

The individual is required to make progress and complete steps toward self-improvement and the restoration of harm. If not, he or she can be referred back to the police, arrested and charged for the original offense. LEAD allows law enforcement and communities to address disorder through a public health framework that genuinely transforms and rehabilitates individuals. Studies have shown that individuals who are diverted through LEAD are 58% less likely than others to be re-arrested.

New Castle County should therefore collaborate with the Attorney General to implement its own LEAD program. This program should particularly focus on diverting heroin users toward the treatment and support that they need to kick their addictions and rebuild their lives.

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There is so much more that we can do to address our county's heroin problem. And there is no excuse for inaction. The time to step up and take action is now. We cannot wait while thousands of county residents are desperately struggling with addiction, with hundreds dying annually. The county's leaders, collaborating with leaders at all levels of government, must take prompt and decisive action to address this terrible epidemic in our county.