



BCHD PRESS RELEASE

Baltimore City Health Department

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Baltimore City Observes International Overdose Awareness Day

1,113 lives lost in Baltimore City to overdose over the last five years

BALTIMORE, MD (August 31, 2015) – Officials across Baltimore City today observed International Overdose Awareness Day to mark the ongoing fight against overdoses in Baltimore and to remember the 1,113 lives lost to overdose over the last five years.

Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) hosted activities throughout the day, including:

- Announcing a donation of approximately 6,500 lifesaving EVZIO® naloxone auto-injectors, a prescription for use in opioid overdose emergencies, from pharmaceutical company Kaléo;
- Free naloxone trainings at five “DontDie.org” bus and Metro station poster sites throughout the city; and
- A remembrance vigil hosted by Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake where 1,113 purple roses—one for each life lost in Baltimore to overdose in the last 5 years—were placed at War Memorial Plaza to honor loved ones who have passed away from substance abuse and to encourage those still struggling with the disease of addiction.

Health Commissioner Dr. Leana Wen has declared heroin use a public health emergency and directed BCHD to expand efforts to decrease opioid-related overdose deaths in Baltimore City. Launched in July, “DontDie.org” is BCHD’s new anti-overdose public education campaign which aims to educate drug users as well as their friends and families about naloxone, a prescription medicine that can stop an overdose and save lives.

“Overdose deaths are a public health emergency,” said Dr. Wen. “Last year, more people died from overdose than died from homicide. The first step to recovery is staying alive. We need to get more life-saving naloxone into the hands of people most at risk.”

EVZIO (naloxone HCl injection) auto-injector is the first and only naloxone product approved and labeled for immediate administration as emergency therapy in any setting where opioids may be present, such as in the home. Voice and visual cues that assist in

guiding a user through the injection process make it easy to use by family members or caregivers with little or no training.

The EVZIO donation is part of the kaléo Cares program, an initiative that gives EVZIO auto-injectors to local law enforcement agencies and community organizations throughout the United States.

“We know that communities throughout the United States are facing an alarming rise in both heroin and prescription-opioid related deaths and we must do more to prepare our citizens at-risk for an opioid emergency, such as an opioid overdose,” said Spencer Williamson, President and CEO of kaléo. “We are honored to support Baltimore City’s efforts to equip their most at-risk citizens with naloxone and help save the lives of those who are experiencing an opioid emergency.”

The evening’s International Overdose Day Remembrance Vigil offered Baltimore residents a chance to remember those who lost their lives to overdose and to ensure that those still at risk have the opportunity for a second chance.

“Substance abuse, including heroin and opioid abuse ties into the very fabric of our city,” Mayor Rawlings-Blake said. “It touches each of us, and is an underlying issue behind so many of our deepest problems: whether it is poverty, crime, or lack of economic empowerment. That is why fighting the epidemic of overdose is absolutely critical.”

This summer, Mayor Rawlings-Blake's Heroin Treatment and Prevention Task Force issued their recommendations, calling for ten bold steps to attack Baltimore City's heroin and opioid addiction epidemic.

There were 303 total drug and alcohol overdose deaths in Baltimore City in 2014, compared with 246 in 2013, a 23 percent increase. Last year, 192 overdose deaths were heroin-related, compared with 150 in 2013.

There are an estimated 18,900 individuals who use heroin in Baltimore.

More information about the city's plan and recommendations can be found at: <http://health.baltimorecity.gov/opioid-overdose/mayors-heroin-treatment-and-prevention-task-force>

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