

Independence Blue Cross Foundation

Supporting Treatment and Overdose Prevention (STOP) Initiative

Background

Every day in the United States, 3,600 people start misusing an opioid pain medication for the first time.ⁱ Nearly two million Americans are addicted to opioid painkillers.ⁱⁱ Individuals abusing opioid medications are 19 times more likely to use heroin compared to people reporting no misuse of opioids.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the southeast Pennsylvania service region of Independence Health Group (Independence) and the Independence Blue Cross Foundation, rates of drug overdose deaths have increased by 30 percent from 2015 to 2016. In Philadelphia alone, overdose deaths nearly doubled from 2013 to 2016 from approximately 459 to approximately 900.^{iv} Among Pennsylvania's 67 counties, Philadelphia (#1), Montgomery (#3), and Delaware (#5) rank in the top five in number of opioid-related overdose deaths. Data supports the tragic and increasingly common stories of suffering and suggests an even greater urgency for policymakers, providers, and payers to better understand and begin to solve the opioid epidemic in the southeast PA region.

Independence and the Independence Blue Cross Foundation recognize the great and urgent need to address the opioid epidemic in the southeast region of Pennsylvania, and are working collaboratively across public and private sectors. Since 2011, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation has invested more than \$28 million in strategic partnerships in nursing and community health to achieve a shared mission of improving the overall health and well-being of communities. Through its STOP initiative, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation is allocating additional resources and advancing evidence-based research to achieve scalable impact and replication of solutions to prevent and treat opioid abuse and addiction. STOP is increasing awareness of the public health crisis facing the community and improving access to opioid abuse prevention and treatment through strategic grant-making and cross-sector partnerships. Together, with regional partners and national experts in health and policy, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation aims to break the cycle of addiction.

Strategic Priorities

Leveraging Cross-Sector Collaboration

Emergency Room Warm Handoff

Prevention

Prescription Drug Takeback

Enabling Community Partners

Supporting Nonprofits & Centers of Excellence

Empowering Nurses

Nurse Engagement & Education

Supporting Treatment and Overdose Prevention (STOP)

Leveraging Cross-Sector Collaboration

Emergency Room Warm Handoff

In response to the Pennsylvania mandate, the 67 counties in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are required to stand up emergency room-based warm-handoff programs, which use the emergency room setting to provide a drug overdose survivor with an immediate referral to addiction treatment. However, county implementation is in various stages: operational, transitional, and no protocol in place. Within the southeast Pennsylvania region, Montgomery and Delaware counties have initiated warm-handoff protocols that have resulted in positive preliminary outcomes.

In Bucks County, Pennsylvania, the Bucks-County-Connect-Assess-Refer-Engage-Support (B-CARES) Program is a county-wide collaborative partnership and care-coordination model that enables emergency room physicians to connect an overdose survivor with a certified recovery specialist who can match an individual with treatment options at a point when s/he is likely most receptive.

To determine the effectiveness of the B-CARES Program and to bolster warm-handoff programs in surrounding counties, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation is funding research that will result in recommendations for best practices and a replicable, scalable model for the region and nation.

Prevention

Prescription Drug Take Back

Drug take-back programs are an effective primary prevention strategy that reduces the availability of unused and expired prescription drugs in households, a well-known source for opiate abuse initiation. 70 percent of individuals gain access to opioids from people they know,^v which includes taking prescription drugs from medicine cabinets.

In Pennsylvania, the number of drug take-back locations varies dramatically in counties across the state. Two urban areas, Allegheny and Philadelphia counties, have high rates of opioid-related overdose deaths, but relatively low rates per 100,000 residents of drug take-back sites (0.3, respectively) when compared with suburban and rural areas.^{vi} In some counties where the opioid-related overdose death rate is high, the number of drug take-back locations is low or there is no data reported. For example, in Susquehanna County, the rate per 100,000 residents of opioid-related overdose death is the second highest in the state (13.1) but no data was reported on the availability of take-back locations in the county.^{vi}

Availability, awareness, and accessibility are critical to the continued success of drug take-back programs. The Independence Blue Cross Foundation STOP initiative supports Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs efforts by bringing public attention to the availability and accessibility of drug take-back sites in the southeast Pennsylvania region. Using ongoing social media promotion and prominent ad placement leading up to National Drug Take-Back Day events, the STOP Drug Take-Back campaign helped raise public awareness of the 148 drug take-back sites in the southeast Pennsylvania region, which collected more than 17,000 pounds of prescription drugs at the October 22, 2016 take-back day event.

Drug take-back sites in the southeast Pennsylvania region account for 25 percent of the total number of locations across the Commonwealth (584). Through STOP, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation is evaluating opportunities to increase availability, awareness, and accessibility to drug take-back locations across Pennsylvania in partnership with national pharmacies, the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, and local enforcement agencies.

Enabling Community Partners

Supporting Nonprofits and Centers of Excellence

The Independence Blue Cross Foundation STOP initiative aims to make resources available to those impacted by addiction by awarding grant funding to national and local nonprofits that provide community-based treatment and prevention programs in the southeast Pennsylvania region. Through its Blue Safety Net program, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation has invested nearly \$16 million in 40 private, nonprofit health centers that provide affordable access to quality primary care for underserved communities in the southeast Pennsylvania region. Among the Blue Safety Net-funded programs is The Moyer Foundation's Camp Mariposa and Community Camp Mariposa, an addiction prevention and mentoring program for children affected by a family member's substance abuse.

Through STOP, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation is evaluating Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for opioid addiction at health centers to determine gaps in care and opportunities to build treatment capacity in the region. The Foundation is also partnering with Centers of Excellence and experts in opioid addiction to bridge gaps in care coordination and enhance education in the community.

Empowering Nurses

Nurse Engagement and Education

Nurses are on the front lines of care at the bedside and in the community. The Independence Blue Cross Foundation is empowering nurses by increasing their knowledge of opioid dependency to ensure they can provide the best care possible to patients in greatest need.

Through its Nurses for Tomorrow program, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation has invested nearly \$7.5 million in the education of nurses pursuing undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees at 21 regional nursing schools. Among the eleven schools that receive Independence Blue Cross Foundation graduate nursing scholarship grants, six nursing schools have pledged to integrate the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) safe prescribing guidelines in graduate level nursing curriculum.^{vii}

Through STOP, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation is convening national nurse leaders and academic nursing partners to double the number of nursing schools in the southeast Pennsylvania region that will integrate the CDC guidelines, and to champion a significant increase in the number of nursing school pledges nationally. As an effective convener and leader in nursing, the Foundation is hosting workshops with national health policy experts to improve clinic engagement and disseminate best practices.

References

- i <http://www.nsc.org/RxDrugOverdoseDocuments/Prescription-Nation-2016-American-Drug-Epidemic.pdf>
- ii <http://www.nsc.org/RxDrugOverdoseDocuments/Prescription-Nation-2016-American-Drug-Epidemic.pdf>
- iii <http://www.nsc.org/RxDrugOverdoseDocuments/Prescription-Nation-2016-American-Drug-Epidemic.pdf>
- iv <http://www.philly.com/philly/health/addiction/Fatal-overdoses-in-Phila-surged-in-2016-task-force-launched.html>
- v <http://www.nsc.org/RxDrugOverdoseDocuments/Prescription-Nation-2016-American-Drug-Epidemic.pdf>
- vi Confronting an Epidemic: Opioid Overdose Prevention in Pennsylvania, State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup, 2016
- vii <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/opioids>



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