The Medical Reserve Corps
Response to the Opioid Epidemic

Background
Every day, 115 Americans die from prescription painkiller and heroin-induced opioid overdoses, a rate five times greater than in 1999.1 NACCHO urges local, state, and federal governments to implement evidence-based policies and programs to prevent and treat opioid use disorder and its related health consequences. The 2017 Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Challenge Awards highlighted in this fact sheet demonstrate the MRC’s response to the opioid epidemic.

The Essential Role of Partnerships
Engaging policymakers, parents, youth and youth-serving agencies, healthcare professionals, concerned citizens, and people in recovery is imperative to implementing strategies that engage persons most at risk of opioid misuse, overdose, and diversion. MRC units exemplify how integrating partners is essential to maximizing project impact. Partners can help raise community awareness, identify points of prevention, analyze data trends, and encourage licensing boards to enforce appropriate opioid prescribing and dispensing practices, among other activities.

Prevention: Community Outreach and Education
Opioid overdose prevention education increases awareness of the risks of prescription opioid misuse, reduces the stigma associated with addiction, teaches individuals to identify the signs and symptoms of opioid addiction, and connects individuals to resources. Community outreach and education activities are also an opportunity to recruit new volunteers and partners.

Harm Reduction
Harm reduction services, such as overdose drug reversal medication administration trainings, medication take-back programs, fentanyl testing, and infectious disease testing, can reduce the negative consequences of opioid use.

Spotlight on the MRC Response
Partnerships
Union County MRC #2289 implemented the Rebuilding Lives project, which expanded services and access to opiate treatment in its community. The coalition of partners developed a website with local community resources to address the opioid epidemic (http://www.rebuildinglivesmrc.org), produced and distributed educational brochures and flyers, brought educational speakers to schools, hosted town hall meetings for parents, and carried out a drug take-back project with local law enforcement. The MRC unit leader shared that community partnerships were vital to their accomplishments.

Outreach
Wasatch County MRC #554 conducted community outreach on medication safety for kids and adults. The MRC prepared talking points for volunteers. A member of the unit shared that outreach and education were key: “People in our community were interested in naloxone/Narcan. Some were skeptical, some had never heard of it, and most didn’t know much about it. We learned that allowing time to have an open discussion about it and time to answer questions was needed.”

Overdose Drug Reversal Medication
Of the 2017 Challenge Awards, five MRC units provided overdose reversal medication administration trainings. LaSalle County MRC #1552 reported immediate success with trainings, sharing that “by January, the [chief of the fire department] shared that five overdoses had been reversed by his department using the skills and supplies provided by the [MRC].”

Medication Take-Back Program
Wasatch County MRC #554 held a medication take-back day. The MRC distributed re-sealable plastic bags throughout the community printed with information about medication take-back, benefits, and drop-off locations.
Overdose Drug Reversal Medications

Overdose drug reversal medication, such as naloxone, can save the lives of individuals who have overdosed. MRC units have provided trainings for their members and partners on naloxone administration.

Medication Take-Back Programs

Medication take-back programs create a safe method for people to dispose of unused prescription opioids. This prevents unused medication from contaminating soil and groundwater and reduces the risk of misuse amongst friends and loved ones. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that only about 20% of prescription opioid users obtain opioids from their own prescription; others obtain them by receiving, buying, or stealing them from friends or relatives, buying from drug dealers or strangers, or other methods.

Linkages to Care

In 2011, nearly 90% of Americans 12 years and older who needed treatment for substance use disorders did not receive treatment at a substance use disorder facility.2 Linkages to care connect people to the treatment and recovery support services they need. MRC units have provided medication-assisted treatment clinics and recovery coaching programs to help close this gap.

Medication Assisted Treatment Clinics

The 2016 U.S. Surgeon General’s report on alcohol, drugs, and health states that although medications are effective in treating substance use disorders, they are underused, often due to a lack of treatment programs.3 MRC units can fill this gap by staffing treatment clinics.

Recovery Coach Trainings

Recovery coaches are intended to help people sustain recovery from addiction by addressing non-clinical issues such as housing, education, employment, and social resources. Recovery coaching has been shown to increase length of abstinence from substances.3 MRC units can provide recovery coach trainings to supplement local recovery services and help prevent relapses.

References


Resources

- HHS Opioids Website - https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/