

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.

[FACT SHEET]

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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.



Medication Assisted Treatment

Macoupin County MRC #363 volunteers participated in the local health department's clinic for substance use treatment. MRC volunteer activities included education, training, and outreach relating to mental health and substance use topics. Their activities helped to connect people to the clinic's services.

Recovery Coach

Northern New Hampshire MRC #138 created an initiative to increase the number of certified, local recovery coaches by training MRC volunteers and partners, and making them an available resource to hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Two other MRC units also created well-check teams to check on recovering patients periodically in-person and also through social media, call, text, and email.

Resources

- NACCHO Opioids Website - <http://bit.ly/2K87b96>
- SAMSHA: Naloxone Access Laws - <http://bit.ly/2Lx5dM>
- SAMHSA: Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit - <http://bit.ly/2PL8Lgo>
- HHS Opioids Website - <https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/>
- Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health - <http://bit.ly/2wvjv6tg>

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). Understanding the Epidemic webpage. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>
2. Trust for America's Health. (2013). *Prescription Drug Abuse: Strategies to Stop the Epidemic*. Washington, DC: Trust for America's Health. Retrieved from <http://healthyamericans.org/assets/files/TFAH2013RxDrugAbuseRptFINAL.pdf>
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General. (2016). *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health*. Washington, DC: HHS. Retrieved from <https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-generals-report.pdf>

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1201 Eye Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20005

Phone: 202-783-5550 • Fax: 202-783-1583

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