



## Missouri Opioid Response Efforts

As we have traveled throughout Missouri listening to the stories of people across the state, it is readily apparent that the opioid epidemic is affecting many Missouri families. It is the number one public health crisis we face and going forward there are actions we need to undertake to both save lives and change lives. Opioid misuse manifests itself tragically in the sudden death of people from overdose, children placed in foster care because of parent addiction, chronic liver disease caused by hepatitis that is transferred through shared needles, and people who suffer from addiction to prescription narcotics and heroin. The origins of this epidemic are complex but solutions must recognize that:

- 80% of all the oral opioids used in the world are used in the United States
- There are 89,000 prescriptions for narcotics for every 100,000 Missourians
- Prescribed narcotics are often diverted to illegal use
- 80% of all people who use heroin initially used prescription narcotics
- 2 people die from narcotic overdose and 2 babies are born that are treated for narcotic withdrawal every day somewhere in Missouri

Governor Greitens has made it clear that our number one goal is to save lives at immediate risk while simultaneously implementing a comprehensive initiative that addresses all aspects of the epidemic. Thus, after working with the legislature in May, the Governor signed legislation that accomplishes the following:

- Will make naloxone (nasal spray that reverses opioid overdose) available to all Missourians simply by going to a pharmacy and obtaining it through the DHSS Director's DEA number, no matter where you live in Missouri.
- Good Samaritan Law which encourages people to seek help and get into treatment.
- Funding for drug take back efforts.
- Establishment of drug courts.

We are also moving upstream and adopting national guidelines that emphasize education of patients about the risks of opioids and other less risky options for the treatment plan. On March 27<sup>th</sup>, Missouri's Medicaid program implemented initiatives to limit new opioid prescriptions to a 7-day limit and improve access to naloxone. Additionally, we are implementing a prescription drug monitoring program and launching a coordinated, integrated cabinet effort to meet the challenges of the opioid crisis.

While prevention must be emphasized, those families who have loved ones who suffer from

addiction need our help and we don't want them to face these challenges alone. Addiction is a chronic relapsing disease that requires sustained treatment much like other chronic diseases. Our goal is to increase the number of physicians treating addiction and also institute measures that prevent the spread of hepatitis. Driving east from Jefferson city, a billboard reminds us that 128,000 Missourians suffer from hepatitis C which can spread by shared needles and these needles can put law enforcement and health care providers at risk responding to overdoses, so we need to work with those engaged in trying to prevent further infection.

The Governor has asked us to devote our considerable energy to work with all of our partners to find existing paths or create new ones to save lives. Missouri is blessed with citizens already engaged in their communities that want to join us to taking action, and that gives us hope. Governor Greitens and all of us never lose sight of the fact that every life saved is someone's son or daughter. We want no child, no parent, no spouse or no friend, no neighbor watch a loved one, or someone they have been called to help, die a preventable death from overdose or addiction.



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