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Report on Drug Overdose Deaths Shows Need for Evidence-Based Prevention

Deaths from unintentional overdoses jumped 20% from 2014 to 2015 in Ohio. A [report](#) released Thursday by the Ohio Department of Health shows 3,050 unintentional drug overdose deaths in 2015. This was driven by a large increase in fentanyl-related deaths, which increased from 84 in 2013 to 1,155 in 2015. Fentanyl is a synthetic narcotic that is estimated to be 30 to 50 times more potent than heroin. Fentanyl-related deaths were highest among those 25-34 years old (32%).

The numbers could have been much worse. Deaths due to unintentional overdoses of prescribed opiates fell from 26.6% in 2014 to 21.9% in 2015. UHCAN Ohio commends the Kasich administration and legislators who have worked to reduce the available supply of opiates.

In addition to critical supply-side work, we must address substance use at the demand level. Prevention and intervention, especially with children and young adults, is critical to eliminating unintentional overdose deaths over time. For Ohio to be successful in its battle against deaths from drug overdoses, evidence-based prevention methodologies must be used. A proven approach is *Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment* (SBIRT).

For youth, a trusted and trained adult, such as a school nurse, asks a few simple screening questions about alcohol and drug use. A negative screening (no substance use) is followed by a strong prevention message. If the young person has begun to use substances, a structured conversation to help them devise strategies to avoid substance use follows, including other steps involving parents. Where necessary, a referral to treatment is made.

SBIRT has the endorsement of the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). It has been used in several schools in Ohio. If SBIRT is implemented in schools across Ohio in a consistent fashion from year to year, the number of Ohioans dying from overdoses should fall steadily, with a big payoff coming in 2026 when the 15-year-olds of today hit age 25, the age at which the unintentional drug overdose death rate begins to spike.

Ohio can win its battle against unintentional drug overdose deaths if we use SBIRT, along with other evidence-based prevention methodologies, to catch young people

experimenting with drugs before they are addicted. Parents and school administrators should investigate how they can use SBIRT in their efforts to keep children safe from drugs.

You can learn more by contacting Kathleen Gmeiner at kgmeiner@uhcanohio.org.

UHCAN Ohio is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit organization building the voice of consumers to achieve quality, affordable, accessible health coverage for all Ohioans. www.uhcanohio.org

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