

Independence Blue Cross Foundation

Supporting Treatment and Overdose Prevention (STOP) Initiative

Background

Every day in the United States, more than 130 people die as a result of an opioid overdose.ⁱ In 2016 nearly 2.1 million Americans were identified as having Opioid Use Disorder (OUD),ⁱⁱ which is characterized by a physical and psychological reliance on opioids.ⁱⁱⁱ An estimated 29 percent of patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain misuse them.^{iv}

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 15 percent between 2016 and 2017.^v In Philadelphia alone, the rate increased by 34 percent. Since 2013 and Philadelphia overdose rates have more than doubled from 459 to 1,217.^{vi} Among Pennsylvania's 67 counties, Philadelphia (#1), Montgomery (#3), and Delaware County (#5) rank in the top 5 for 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 Pennsylvania region.

Independence and the Independence Blue Cross Foundation recognize the 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 \$31 million in strategic partnerships in nursing and community health to achieve a shared mission of improving the health and well-being of communities. Through its Supporting Treatment and Overdose Prevention (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 OUD. STOP is increasing awareness of the public health crisis facing the community and improving access to opioid misuse 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 the opioid epidemic.

Strategic Priorities

Leveraging Cross-Sector Collaboration

Emergency Room Warm Handoff

Addressing the Stigma of Opioid Use Disorder

Someone You Know Campaign and Conference

Prevention

Prescription Drug Takeback

Enabling Community Partners

Supporting Nonprofits

Empowering Providers

Nurse Engagement and Education



INDEPENDENCE BLUE CROSS
FOUNDATION

Independence 

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 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. Chester and Philadelphia counties have established warm handoff programs. 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.

The Independence Blue Cross Foundation initiated a study to understand utilization, design, and effectiveness of warm handoff programs in our region. Even among hospitals with warm handoff protocols, there is a variation in process and success rates. After reviewing practices at five Bucks County Hospitals in the B-CARES program, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation found the following to be best practice recommendations for warm handoff programs:

- Increase access to Certified Recovery Specialists
- More training for emergency room staff to improve care coordination and reduce stigma
- Use of electronic health record systems to make access to treatment more efficient
- Promote, through government grants, the conversion and co-location of treatment facilities onsite at hospitals where possible
- Empower Emergency Medical Services personnel in facilitating the treatment process

Addressing the Stigma of Opioid Use Disorder

Someone You Know Campaign and Conference

Stigma is universally recognized as a barrier to individuals and families seeking help. Sharing positive stories of people affected by substance use disorder is an effective strategy for addressing social stigma. Within health care systems, an effective approach to reducing stigma is training and education programs for medical students and professionals.

Through STOP and in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs and the Pennsylvania State University, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation launched Someone You Know, a regional multimedia public awareness campaign that humanizes the disease of opioid use disorder to remove stigma as a barrier to recovery. By sharing inspiring and real stories of individuals affected by opioid use disorder, and convening regional community forums, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation is helping to remove stigma and raise awareness of local treatment resources. The Independence Blue Cross Foundation is working with experts in education and medicine to reduce stigma among clinical professionals.

To further its efforts, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation convened Someone You Know: Facing the Opioid Crisis Together, a national conference to improve the health of individuals and communities affected by the opioid epidemic. The conference brought public health and civic leaders together to explore education, intervention, treatment, and the stigma associated with substance use disorder and other barriers to recovery.

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. Seventy percent of individuals gain access to opioids from people they know,^{vii} 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.^{viii} 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 boxes in the county.^{ix}

Availability, awareness, and accessibility are critical to the continued success of prescription drug take-back programs. The Independence Blue Cross Foundation STOP initiative supports Pennsylvania Drug and Alcohol Programs efforts by bringing public attention to the availability and accessibility of drug take-back sites in the southeast 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 153-drug take-back sites in the southeast Pennsylvania region, which collected more than 17,000 pounds of prescription drugs at the October 22, 2017 take-back day event.

Drug take-back sites in the southeast Pennsylvania region account for 22 percent of locations across the Commonwealth (681). Through STOP, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation has increased availability and accessibility to drug take-back locations through a local partnership with Walgreens, a national pharmacy.

Enabling Community Partners

Supporting Nonprofits

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 more than \$18 million in more than 40 private, nonprofit health centers that provide affordable access to quality primary care to underserved communities in the southeast Pennsylvania region. Many offer substance use disorder screening, Medication Assisted Treatment, and support. Among the STOP-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 use disorder. The Independence Blue Cross Foundation is also partnering with Caron Treatment Centers and experts in opioid use disorder to bridge gaps in care coordination, build treatment capacity, and enhance education in the community. This includes a focus on screening and intervention tools in schools, better educating school-based professionals, and supporting parents with the resources they need. In total, more than \$850,000 in grant funding has been awarded by the Independence Blue Cross Foundation through the STOP initiative.

Empowering Providers

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 and families in greatest need. Through its Nurses for Tomorrow program, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation has invested nearly \$10 million in the education of nurses pursuing undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees at regional nursing schools. Among the 21 schools that receive Independence Blue Cross Foundation nursing scholarship grants, six nursing schools have pledged to integrate the Center for Disease Control (CDC) safe prescribing guidelines in graduate level nursing curriculum.^x As an effective convener and leader in nursing, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation hosted workshops with national health policy experts to improve clinic engagement and disseminate best practices. Through STOP, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation is enhancing nursing education through research and online clinical training.

References

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