Grant to help expand opioid abuse treatment

The numbers are staggering. In 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimated that 1.9 million Americans had an opioid use disorder related to prescription pain medication, and 586,000 had an opioid use disorder related to heroin. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has deemed the opioid crisis a national epidemic, citing a four-fold increase in overdose deaths involving opioids since 1999. In Georgia, the rate of death from opioid-involved overdoses increased from 2.6 per 100,000 people in 2006 to 8.8 per 100,000 in 2015. In 2015, 1,307 Georgians died from a drug overdose. Sixty-eight percent of these deaths were caused by opioids.

The opioid crisis is ravaging communities across Georgia and our nation, leaving many families grieving for loved ones. While data depicting the full economic impact is not readily available at this time, we know anecdotally that opioid use is also affecting our workforce, with impacts on absenteeism and productivity.

States have responded to this epidemic in a variety of ways. In Georgia, Attorney General Chris Carr recently convened a Statewide Opioid Task Force to support communication between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors; local, state, and federal officials; and other stakeholders to ensure that our state has strong and effective tools to combat the crisis. Members of the task force work to address the crisis in different ways, including through prevention, rehabilitation, legislation, law enforcement, workforce, and health care. The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) participates on this task force and is responsible for the prevention, treatment, and recovery components of Georgia’s opioid response. DBHDD has partnered with the Department of Public Health to develop a strategic plan for addressing the opioid crisis. DBHDD also contracts with the Council on Alcohol and Drugs to implement the Georgia Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Initiative, which focuses on education, advocacy, proper medication storage and disposal, and enforcement, to prevent and reduce prescription drug abuse (http://stoprxabuseingga.org/).

In April, DBHDD received an $11.8 million State Targeted Response (STR) grant from SAMHSA, which enables DBHDD to:

- Expand capacity for medication-assisted treatment within the publicly funded system;
- Support peer-operated phone lines to help people struggling with opioid addiction;
- Connect individuals with ongoing treatment after an overdose;
- Conduct prevention efforts through a statewide media campaign;
- Provide training in the administration of naloxone (a drug used to reverse an opioid overdose) to communities and first responders, and
- Contract with providers to implement SAMHSA’s Strategic Prevention Framework model for four high-need communities and a project within a school system.

The STR opioid grant has allowed DBHDD to provide targeted increases in prevention, treatment, and recovery across Georgia. DBHDD has contracted with the following providers in metro Atlanta: Medical Association of Georgia; GUIDE Inc.; Grady Health System; Newport Integrated Behavioral Health; Saint Jude’s Recovery Center; Southside Medical Center; Georgia Council on Substance Abuse; and Navigate Recovery Gwinnett.

The opioid epidemic has shined a spotlight on addiction and the continued need for community collaboration, treatment services, and a path for individuals to recover. DBHDD and our provider network and advocacy partners believe that prevention and recovery are not only possible but should be the goals of any program targeted at addressing the opioid epidemic.

Seeking help for an opioid or other substance use disorder is often difficult, but there are many resources in Georgia that are ready to help. The Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL) provides 24/7 free and confidential access to routine and crisis services statewide: (800) 715-4225. Individuals may call GCAL on another’s behalf. In the case of a suspected overdose, always call 911 first.

I encourage you to visit our website, www.dbhdd.georgia.gov, for more information.

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) is the state agency that supports people with mental health needs, substance use disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our vision is easy access to high-quality care that leads to a life of recovery and independence for the people we serve. Judy Fitzgerald has served as commissioner of DBHDD since 2016.