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Aniket N. Pandya
University of Massachusetts Medical School

Et al.

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Joining the Fight Against the Opioid Epidemic through the Head Start Program in Lowell, MA
Aniket Pandya, B.S.; Monica Tawadros, B.S.; Leanne Winchester, M.S., R.N.
University of Massachusetts Medical School

Introduction
One morning at the Head Start Program in Lowell, Massachusetts, a mother was found unconscious on the bathroom floor. Following drop off, this mother self-administered a lethal dose of opioids in the Head Start restroom. Thankfully, this mother survived.

Since 2014, fatal overdoses have been increasing, in Lowell (Mass.gov, 2020). As such, a program self-assessment provided enough evidence that the Head Start Lowell needed to offer services to families affected by substance use disorders.

The Lowell Head Start program commits to its efforts to combat the opioid epidemic. To support the Head Start Lowell program, the University of Massachusetts Medical School has forged collaborations with facilities close to Head Start in Lowell by creating informational pamphlets that detail all the services offered to people with substance use disorders in Lowell and nearby towns. To capitalize on the statewide and local efforts to bring opioid addition out in the open, an educational tool will be created to serve as a resource for families that seek or are referred for services.

The informational tool details the most common signs and symptoms of substance use disorders and it brings to the forefront the most recent scientific advancements regarding treatment of substance use disorders in plain language. Additionally, Lowell Head Start will have forged connections with local community organizations serving those struggling with opioid use disorder.

What is Head Start?

Head Start, a federally funded program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, promotes school readiness and family well-being in children from birth to age five who meet specific criteria. The criteria include living at or below the poverty line, living in foster care, being homeless, receiving public assistance, and living with a disability. The Head Start program provides early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services. (Office of Head Start | ACF, 2019).

Objectives

• Gather and analyze available data on opioid use in Lowell, MA and establish evidence-based methods to help decrease opioid use and addiction.
• Educate family members and Head Start staff on the tell-tale signs and symptoms of opioid use to better assist the program in delivering proper, family-centered childcare.
• Provide essential information to families enrolled at Head Start Lowell who have identified that they are struggling with substance use disorders.
• Establish local connections (rehabilitation centers, hospital programs, clean needle drop-off sites, etc.) to Head Start Lowell that have shown to be effective forms of treatment and recovery

Available Resources

• NARC: 1-822-6767, Lowell House Addiction Treatment and Recovery at 978-549-8566, Learn to Cope at 508-738-5148, The MA Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline at 800-327-5050
• Narcan Info: Narcan temporarily reverses the opioid, does not harm anyone when given, comes in a nasal spray form and intramuscular injection, takes 2 to 3 minutes to be effective but only lasts for 8 to 10 minutes, and must be supplemented with Emergency Services.
• Sings of Oversed: Blue lips and fingernails, clammy cool skin, no response to painful stimuli or verbal stimuli, person does not wake up, shallow and slow breathing
• Medication Drop-off services:
  - Call Syringe Collection Program at 978-674-1049 to report a discarded needle in Lowell
  - Drop-in Locations:
    - Lowell Health Department at 978-674-1049
    - Lowell Senior Center at 978-674-1171
    - Lowell Regional Wastewater Utility at 978-674-4248
• Available City-Wide Programs:
  - Lowell Community Opioid Outreach Programs
  - MA Opioid Abuse and Prevention Collaborative of Greater Lowell
  - Partnerships for Success Program
• Hotlines
  - To talk to someone: 1-877-870-4873
  - Treatment assistance: 1-800-327-5050
• Prevention Services:
  - SAMSHA
• Treatment Facilities:
  - Lowell Habit OPCODE Treatment Center
  - Lowell Community Health Center Substance Abuse Program
  - Self-Management, And Recovery Training
• Detoxification services:
  - Spectrum Health Systems
  - AdCare Treatment Centers
• Support Group Services:
  - The Massachusetts Organization of Addiction Recovery (MDAR)
• Virtual Learning Resources about Substance Use
  - Drug Free Greater Lowell

References


Figure 1: Number of opioid-related fatal overdose deaths, a four-year period, demonstrating a 68% increase in fatalities in a four-year period

Figure 2: On the left is an image of the Head Start facility located in Lowell, MA. On the right are some statistics of the population represented at Head Start Lowell.

Conclusion

The opioid epidemic has affected many states, including Massachusetts, across the United States. It is a large undertaking to join the fight against fatal overdoses and opioid addiction and there is a gap to be bridged between those suffering with opioid addition and the services that are already available to them. With the significant rise in fatal overdoses in the city of Lowell, many departments and programs have been developed to combat the opioid epidemic. This project has revealed a 68% increase in opioid related deaths between 2014 and 2018 (Mass.gov, 2020). This project aims to provide vital information to the Head Start Program and the families they serve, and to provide established resources available in Lowell, such as medication disposals, Narcan and signs of overdose training, needle drop-off services, available hotlines, and city-wide programs, including Lowell Community Opioid Outreach Programs, MA Opioid Abuse and Prevention Collaborative of Greater Lowell, and Partnerships for Success Program. Further steps will focus on distributing the most recent scientific advancements dealing with the substance use disorder into the forefront and simplify that information for the general public. Additionally, we will continue actively forging connections with local community organizations for those currently struggling with opioid use disorder.