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Press Release

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DPH Report Shows Notable Decrease in Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths in Weymouth

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Weymouth, MA – On May 15, 2019, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) issued its Quarter 1 Opioid Report which indicates that Weymouth is amongst 7 other communities to experience a notable decrease in opioid-related overdose deaths from 2017-2018. The report notes that this decrease is for both resident opioid-related overdose deaths and occurrences in the Town, making Weymouth one of only three communities to see such results.

According to the report, opioid-related overdose deaths have fallen statewide by 4%. The number of deaths in Weymouth has decreased by 60% between 2016 and 2018. Opioid-related deaths have decreased over 54% between 2015 and 2018, and total overdoses, including non-fatal overdoses reversed by Narcan, have decreased by over 31% in the last 3 years.

The reduction in opioid-related overdoses is a result of a concerted effort to provide immediate response to overdoses as well as longer-term prevention. Weymouth Police and Fire are trained on the administration of Narcan (also known as naloxone, the anti-overdose drug). The Weymouth Police Department has received a First Responder Naloxone Grant for FY16, FY17, and FY18 and administered the drug over 350 times in those years. In 2018, however, that use dropped about 42% from 2017. With the increasing potency of opioids, including fentanyl and carfentanyl, this is a marked decrease and achievement for the Town.

In addition to response to the opioid crisis, the Town has dedicated resources and staff to a myriad of prevention efforts including the Substance Abuse Prevention Team (SAPT) and the Police Department's Community Outreach Unit.

"Since 2012, the Weymouth Fire Department has been a leader in the effort to reduce opioid related deaths in the Town. The Weymouth Fire Department was one of the first three communities at the time in the State to institute a Narcan program," **said Weymouth Fire Chief Keith Stark.** "On a daily basis we operate on the front lines where we are often the first to provide care and the important life-saving drug Narcan, and I am very proud of the accomplishments of the Weymouth Fire Department as well as our community partners to be recognized for our efforts."

"Since the creation of our Community Outreach Unit, Weymouth has been able to make hundreds of home visits in a proactive effort to help overdose victims and their families", **said Weymouth Police Chief Richard Grimes.** "The collaboration between the Police Department, Substance Abuse Prevention Team, Fire Department, Weymouth Public Schools, South Shore Health Systems and, most recently Aspire Health Alliance, has enabled us to be at the forefront of opioid use prevention and this data shows that these collaborative efforts are saving lives."

The Community Outreach Unit has organized a community-based Drug Addiction Resource Team (DART), composed of local partners and led by Weymouth Police Community Outreach Division. Collaboration with South Shore Health Systems and Aspire Health Alliance enables the town to provide mental health services as well during outreach to families and those suffering Substance Use Disorders (SUD). The officers in the Community Outreach Unit have made proactive efforts to contact victims of overdoses and their families to explain the availability of programs in the area that can assist individuals seeking treatment.

"This dramatic drop in both non-fatal and fatal overdoses is a testament to the hard work of not only our first responders but of the ongoing commitment at a municipal and community level to address this issue," **said Paul Williams, Weymouth Health Department's Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinator.** "For years the groundwork has been laid in the Health Department's prevention efforts focused on preventing first time use and getting individuals and families the resources they need. We now are starting to see the direct impact of our work."

Mayor Hedlund has made efforts to continue to address this by fully funding a Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinator, supporting the initiatives of the Health Department, and supporting grant-funded programs that combat the issue.

Prevention initiatives currently include:

- The formation of the Substance Abuse Prevention Team (SAPT) that works in conjunction with the Weymouth Youth coalition;
- Public awareness campaigns that provide education on preventing fatal overdoses;
- Medication collection during the Town's Household Hazardous Waste Collections;
- A Medication Kiosk to collect and safely dispose of unwanted medications from residents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at the Weymouth Police Station;

- Participation in the Norfolk County District Attorney's Office buyer diversion treatment alternative program; and
- Participation in regional coalitions such as the Quincy Substance Abuse Prevention Collaborative (SAPC) and Massachusetts Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative (MOAPC).

"The decrease in opioid related overdose deaths, as highlighted by DPH, is really the result of the hard work, collaboration, and outreach we have been implementing here in Weymouth between our First Responders, Substance Abuse Prevention Team, Public Schools, South Shore Health, and others," **said Mayor Hedlund.** "My administration will continue to dedicate the resources necessary to combat this problem to ensure we not only respond to an overdose but also promote prevention programs that reduce stigma and provide recovery support services."

Despite the decreases in opioid-related deaths in the last four years, the total related deaths still remain well above those reported in the early 2000s, indicating that the problem still exists and dedicated resources are needed to continue fighting the opioid epidemic. Weymouth continues to dedicate municipal resources to the problem as well as seek federal and state grant funding for additional resources. The Town participates in a number of collaboratives with public and non-profit partners, to improve response and prevention across the South Shore.

Available Resources

The Weymouth Police Officers in the Community Outreach Unit provide outreach to victims of overdoses and their families. They are available to explain the availability of programs in the area and assist individuals in seeking treatment and utilizing other resources.

The Substance Abuse Prevention Team can provide access to resources including recovery services and educational materials or programs. The SAPT meets the first Monday of every month from 6pm to 7:30pm at the Crossroads Church located at 241 Broad Street. In addition, the Weymouth Health Department Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinator can be contacted at 781-340-5008.

Weymouth Police Department Narcotics Unit conducts investigative work specifically related to street level narcotics operations and Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) that are trafficking narcotics, including cocaine, heroin, and fentanyl. Drug activity can be anonymously reported by calling the anonymous tip line at 781-331-1111. Citizens can talk to a Narcotics Unit detective discreetly by calling the Narcotics Unit at 781-682-6131.

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