Rural Opioid Summit Held in Price

The Tribal and Rural Opioid Initiative was launched by Utah State University Extension in 2018 in an effort to provide effective resources to address opioid use among rural Utahns. The initiative team is working to combat the effects of opioid misuse through prevention, recovery and treatment, with a primary focus on stigma reduction education.

To support these efforts, a community-member focused Rural Opioid Summit will be held in Price, Utah, on July 18 and 19, with an optional pre-conference for substance use professionals on July 17. The summit will provide families and individuals who are personally affected by the opioid epidemic a chance to share resources and learn about recovery strategies, stigma reduction and how to access life-saving harm reduction support. To encourage participation throughout the state, rural community members can receive scholarships for registration as well as travel support.

The summit is sponsored through funding secured by USU Extension Health and Wellness Specialist Sandra Sulzer and Uintah Basin Extension Assistant Professor Suzanne Prevedel. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Rural Opioid Technical Assistance program sponsors the event, which will also include training from the National Institute for Food and Agriculture, Rural Health and Safety Education program.

“Utah is, in many ways, an unusually healthy state,” said Sulzer. “We have some of the lowest rates of cancer in the nation and lower-than-average tobacco and alcohol use rates. Nonetheless, opioids have become a major issue.”

Sulzer said that between 2000 and 2015, the state saw a 400 percent increase in deaths resulting from the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs. And some counties, such as Carbon and Emery, have rates well above that state average, which puts them among the hardest hit in the nation.

“If you have ever wondered what you could do, as an affected family member, person in recovery or community member, this summit is here to provide you with the support and tools you need,” she said.

Ken White, USU Extension vice president, said with Extension offices serving every county in the state, it provides a wonderful opportunity to offer programs and support for all aspects of health for Utahns.

“As the opioid crisis continues to grow, it affects not only the individual, but families, communities and the workplace,” he said. “We hope this summit can offer help and hope to all those in attendance.”

Ashley Yaugher, USU Extension assistant professor of health and wellness, and local summit co-organizer, said that by coming together, those in attendance can make a difference in rural Utah communities to turn the tide of the opioid epidemic.

Co-organizer Patrick Rezac of One Voice Recovery, said that movement begins with empowering individuals who can then help build thriving communities.

The conference features best practices for opioid misuse prevention, treatment and harm reduction; support programs and harm reduction efforts in the state of Utah; inspiring recovery speakers; and many opportunities for collaboration. The pre-conference meeting is geared for substance use disorder counselors and other interested professionals and will cover harm reduction best practices and stigma reduction, with continuing education credits available.

More than a dozen community partners, including the USU Health Extension: Advocacy, Research and Teaching team have been instrumental in creating a grassroots, community-response effort. Visit extension.usu.edu/ruralopioids/ to see a list of sponsors and for registration information.

For further rural summit information, contact Yaugher at Ashley.Yaugher@usu.edu or 435-636-3276. Plans are in the works for a tribal summit for the Utah and western regional Native American communities in 2020. Contact Michelle Chapoose at Michelle.Chapoose@usu.edu for additional tribal summit information.