
Heroin and Opioid Addiction and Rural America

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The heroin and opioid epidemic has spread across the country in the last decade, and overdose deaths in rural areas are now surpassing those in urban areas. Access to prevention, treatment, and support services are typically lacking in rural or farming communities, leading to untreated addiction and increased overdose deaths. Additionally, recent reports show that those who work in occupations with higher rates of injury (farming, construction, roofing, etc.) where workers are less able to take time off to heal are more likely to

medicate acute or chronic pain symptoms with opioids, leading to increased likelihood of addiction (MADPH, 2018).

Unlike heroin, which is not considered to have any legitimate medical uses and can only be obtained illegally, commonly abused opioid drugs are found in a wide range of prescription medication and include oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, and fentanyl. Fentanyl in particular is extremely potent and can be lethal in doses as small as 0.25mg. These drugs are prescribed legally for pain management by medical professionals, but over-prescription, misuse, and overuse rapidly leads to dependence and addiction. Statewide health data tells us that between 2010 and 2015, the rate of opioid overdose deaths in New York per 100,000 people increased by over five times (NYS, 2017).

Per a 2017 study by the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Farmers Union, 74% of farmers or farm workers nationwide report they have been impacted by opioid abuse, either through knowing a friend or family member who dealt with opioid abuse or by having taken opioids or dealing with opioid addiction themselves. Unfortunately, the same study states that only 38% of respondents believe they could find local care that is effective, covered by insurance, or affordable. While there's no silver bullet to halt addiction, and barriers to treatment are still numerous, it's important that New York families understand the resources available to them.

Stopping an Overdose in its Tracks

Naloxone, commonly referred to as Narcan™, is a medication that chemically reverses an opioid overdose as it's happening. Narcan™ comes in a pre-loaded syringe or as a nasal spray to be administered to a person who is experiencing an overdose. Narcan™ is meant for friends, family, or any non-medical persons to administer to someone in the throes of an overdose. Studies show that the odds for overdose recovery are significantly increased when Narcan™ is administered immediately by a non-medical but trained bystander rather than an untrained bystander or no administration of the antidote at all (NCBI, 2015). Training and an available Narcan™ kit on hand is often the difference between a loved one's life and death. Narcan™ trainings offered regularly through the state teach participants how to recognize an overdose and administer the life-saving medicine, and many trainings provide participants with Narcan™ kits to take with them. To find programs offering no-cost Narcan™ trainings in your region, check out the New York State Department of Health Community Calendar of Opioid Overdose Trainings by region at <https://nyoverdose.org/Home/Calendar#>.

Resources for Heroin and Opioid Treatment and Recovery

If you, a friend, a family member, or one of your farmworkers is dealing with opioid or heroin addiction, know that there are numerous resources for those seeking recovery from substance abuse, including in-patient and out-patient services, therapy, and medical treatment. These particular addictions are nearly impossible to overcome without professional help, so please reach out.

- 24/7 HOPELine, NYS Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS): 1-877-846-7369,
- Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS)-Find a treatment near you:

<https://findaddictiontreatment.ny.gov/#/search>

- Narcotics Anonymous meeting finder: <https://www.na.org/meetingsearch/>
- Nar-Anon meeting finder (support for family or friends of those addicted): <https://www.nar-anon.org/find-a-meeting/>
- Interactive map of NYS-authorized Extended Syringe Access Programs (ESAP), Narcan™ availability, and Hepatitis Testing location finder: <http://www.thepointny.org/#>

Stigma and Recovery

The silver lining in the fact that the heroin and opioid epidemic is so widespread is that it's gained national attention. In addition to the National Farmers Union and the American Farm Bureau Federation, government agencies like the USDA and state health departments are funneling funding and resources not only to educate and assist farmers and rural communities in addiction recovery and support, but also to address rural prosperity difficulties and public health concerns that lead to the use of heroin and opioids in the first place. These groups also widely recognize addiction as a disease, which certainly helps to ease the stigma experienced by those struggling and makes seeking treatment more socially acceptable.

Combating the heroin and opioid epidemic starts in your community. Check in on your family, friends, neighbors, and employees. If you see a doctor for pain management, ask if there are available alternatives to opioid medication. Share the above resources for treatment whenever they're needed, and complete a free and local Narcan™ training ASAP. Armed with education and resources for action, our rural and farming communities can work to mitigate this epidemic.

Giglio, R., Li, G., DiMaggio, C. (2015). Effectiveness of bystander naloxone administration and overdose education programs: a meta-analysis. *Inj Epidemiol* 2(1) 10.

National Farmers Union (2017). <https://nfu.org/2017/11/30/survey-shows-massive-opioid-impact-in-farm-country-farm-groups-call-for-dialogue-action/>

New York State Dept. of Health, Opioid Annual Report (2017). https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/opioid/data/pdf/nys_opioid_annual_report_2017.pdf

New York State Dept. of Health 2018-2019 Community Calendar of Opioid Overdose Trainings. <https://nyoverdose.org/Home/Calendar>

Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health (2018). <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/08/15/opioid-industry-occupation.pdf>