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P.A.A.R.I. Launches Survival Kit Program for Those Released from Incarceration Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

BOSTON – Executive Director Allie Hunter announces that the Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (P.A.A.R.I.) has partnered with the Office Based Addiction Treatment Program at Boston Medical Center, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Healthy Streets and AHOPE of Boston Public Health Commission, and three Massachusetts Sheriff's Departments to launch a Survival Kit program to reduce the risk of overdose for those released from the Essex, Middlesex and Suffolk County House of Correction facilities in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.



Law enforcement agencies across the country are grappling with a unique set of challenges as they work to respond to COVID-19. In an effort to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19, several corrections facilities in various parts of the country are releasing people from incarceration who do not pose a significant risk to the public and are vulnerable to COVID-19. While this may help protect this population from the virus should it reach a correctional

facility, those released from incarceration will be at an increased risk for fatal overdose, at a time when area hospitals and medical care centers are being burdened significantly as they work to treat COVID-19 patients.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts' 2016 Chapter 55 Opioid Report found that the rate for fatal opioid overdoses among those recently released from incarceration is 120 times higher than it is for the rest of the adult population. Those being released from incarceration who also have substance use disorder may also be at a greater risk for serious complications from COVID-19, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, because the virus attacks the respiratory system. Those with opioid use disorder could also be put at a higher risk for a fatal overdose should they contract COVID-19 and suffer diminished lung capacity from the virus. Further, self-quarantine and other similar public health efforts may make it more difficult for those with opioid use disorder to access syringe services, medication and other critical supports and programming, especially if they are also experiencing homelessness. To learn more, [click here](#).

In response, the Suffolk, Middlesex, and Essex County Sheriff Departments will partner with P.A.A.R.I. to begin distributing Survival Kits as early as tomorrow.

"In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, people with substance use disorders will face even greater barriers to care and the risk for overdose will rise," Hunter said. "We've rapidly put this Survival Kit together to get lifesaving resources to those with substance use disorders who are being released from incarceration. Whether or not correctional facilities will begin releasing inmates early, it is incredibly important that they consider how to create access to treatment and recovery supports as part of any pre-release or discharge process. We'd like to thank the DPH, Boston Medical Center, Healthy Streets, AHOPE, and our law enforcement partners for making this critical, emergency program possible."

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Bureau of Substance Addiction Services Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution program, in partnership with Healthy Streets and AHOPE of Boston Public Health Commission, will provide approximately 200 NARCAN kits to fast-track the program's implementation, as well as information about community resources.

“In the midst of this pandemic, we are very concerned for the men and women who suffer from substance use disorders,” said Yolanda Smith, Special Suffolk County Sheriff and Superintendent of the Suffolk County House of Correction. “With that, we are pleased to partner with PAARI to provide our folks with resources and survival kits that they will need as they are released from custody and are headed back into our communities. Also, we are very grateful to PAARI for taking the lead on this important project to help folks who are even more at risk in the height of COVID-19 crisis.”

Added Essex County Sheriff Kevin Coppinger: “Due to the coronavirus outbreak, many of those coping with this disease are shut off from the supports and programs. These survival kits are a critical tool in our efforts to help those most vulnerable, especially as they return to their communities through our reentry efforts. I thank P.A.A.R.I., law enforcement agencies and our healthcare partners for continuing its efforts focused on the opioid epidemic and developing these life-saving kits.”

“I want to thank P.A.A.R.I. for the donation of these kits,” said Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian. “Under normal circumstances, reentry planning and services are critical to the short- and long-term success of those leaving our jails and houses of corrections. During these extraordinary times – when ensuring continuity of care is even more difficult – these kits will help individuals with opioid use disorders leaving our custody and returning to the community.”

Under new telemedicine regulations in response to COVID-19, the Office Based Addiction Treatment Program at Boston Medical Center is also providing telemedicine screening and, as appropriate, immediate prescribing for opioid medication treatment at the time the individual is being released from custody. This will be done in partnership with local outreach workers and P.A.A.R.I. recovery coaches, who will provide training and support to those being released, and represents a significant step in creating access to medications for opioid use disorder.

The Survival Kits are being delivered to the Essex, Middlesex and Suffolk County Sheriffs as early as tomorrow for their correctional facilities. The Survival Kits include:

- 4mg nasal naloxone (NARCAN)

- Localized resources to facilitate referrals to detox, harm reduction services, medication for opioid use disorder, and recovery supports, with a focus on telephonic and virtual support
- Information to connect with Boston Medical Center's Office Based Addiction Treatment Program telemedicine and prescribing hotline and local pharmacy partners
- COVID-19 safety information
- Fentanyl safety information and, in some cases, fentanyl test strips

"It's critical that people being released from incarceration as a result of pre-release programs or due to the novel coronavirus pandemic are immediately connected to the resources and supports they need to survive, especially for people with a history of substance use and who are extremely vulnerable to relapse and overdose death. As a result, we've worked tirelessly at P.A.A.R.I. alongside our law enforcement and public health partners to ensure these kits are available," said P.A.A.R.I. Co-Founder and Board Chair John Rosenthal. "Thank you to everyone who has supported us in making this life-saving program a reality, almost overnight."

Law enforcement agencies who would like to replicate the Survival Kit program in their community can reach out to P.A.A.R.I. at 888-9-PAARI-9 or by emailing Hunter at allie@paarius.org to receive training and guidance on how to get started.

To donate to support P.A.A.R.I.'s Survival Kit program, [click here](#) and write "survival kits" in the comments field.

About P.A.A.R.I.

The Police Assisted Addiction & Recovery Initiative (P.A.A.R.I.) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to help law enforcement agencies nationwide create non-arrest pathways to treatment and recovery. Founded alongside the groundbreaking Gloucester MA Police Department Angel Initiative in June 2015, P.A.A.R.I. has been a driving force behind this rapidly expanding community policing movement. We provide technical assistance, coaching, grants, and other capacity-building resources to more than 550 police departments in 35 states. We currently work with more than 130 law enforcement agencies in Massachusetts alone. P.A.A.R.I. and our law enforcement partners are working towards a collective vision where non-

arrest diversion programs become a standard policing practice across the country, thereby reducing overdose deaths, expanding access to treatment, improving public safety, reducing crime, diverting people away from the criminal justice system, and increasing trust between law enforcement and their communities. Our programs and partners have saved thousands of lives, changed police culture, reshaped the national conversation about the opioid epidemic and have placed over 24,000 people into treatment since its founding in June 2015. Learn more at paariususa.org.

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