



Virtual Opioid Task Force Meeting – Update August 3, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

We are delighted to confirm that we will have an update from the office of Congresswoman Katherine Clark, including the status of pending legislation that affects many of our areas of focus. I am confirming the second speaker now and will send out an agenda before the event.

Since I last wrote, Middlesex and the Commonwealth overall have [moved into Phase III](#) in COVID-19 response. We are still seeing new infections, and still practicing social distancing, but certain businesses have reopened.

The [state tracking](#) tells us that as of Sunday there were 110,430 confirmed cases in the Commonwealth, and 25,894 in the cities and towns that make up Middlesex county.

In the first six months of this year, there have been 104 deaths by overdose (other than those that are suicide) to which the state police assigned to this office have been called. Since we were last together on July 1st, there have been 15 deaths: 2 in each of Somerville and Tewksbury, and one in each of Lowell, Belmont, Everett, Waltham, Marlboro, Dracut, Framingham, Maynard, Bedford, and Woburn.

In the same time period, the first six months of this year, state troopers assigned to this office have been called to the scene of 60 deaths by suicide. This is a sharp increase from 2019 when, in the same time period, our troopers were called to the scene of 25 deaths by suicide. The District Attorney, who has always been focused on the intersection of behavioral health and community safety, has been working with experts in the field to try to understand and to bring proven prevention practices to our communities. We will continue this work and look forward to the opportunity to hear from clinical experts and share the evidence based practices for prevention as well as addressing the implications of loss for survivors.

The [MA Department of Public Health](#) maintains data on deaths by suicide. The most recent year for which data are available is 2017. Their data include information about marital status, race, education, etc. The information that our office gathers does not have that level of detail. I do call your attention to a [recent article about an uptick in suicides](#) among Black residents in Chicago. The article points to [CDC data](#) that show the increase in the past decade in deaths by suicide nationally and, using a “pulse survey” which is designed to [gather timely data](#), that rates among Black americans are on the rise.

As a non-scientist, when I start to look at the data, it can become overwhelming. There is so much information out there and the numbers seem daunting. The ability to work together and offer resources on the local and regional level, and to share information seems particularly important. Toward that end, we are pleased to be working with the



many community partners brought together by Melrose Wakefield Healthcare to put together a program (we heard a bit about it from Eileen Dern at our last meeting) to offer - live, in appropriate, safe venues with social distancing, as well as through Zoom - opportunity for conversation and sharing of resources FOCUSED ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH. Save the date, September 23rd from 6:30-8:30. More information to come.

Finally, August 31 will mark [International Overdose Awareness Day](#). Here in Massachusetts there are three registered activities, but none, yet, in Middlesex. The National Safety Council has many resources for activities. In these difficult times, when we are all struggling to keep our communities together and, at the same time grappling with the financial realities of the impact of the pandemic, this might be an opportunity to work together on an activity to help offer support to survivors and highlight the availability of narcan and other harm reduction resources.

I look forward to seeing you all (if only through Zoom) on August 20th.

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