

In Ohio, overdose deaths soared even with ad campaign

October 27 2017, by Andrew Welsh-Huggins

Anti-opioid abuse campaigns have targeted Ohio communities for years even as drug overdose deaths continue to soar in the hard-hit state. The effectiveness of such campaigns is under scrutiny as President Donald Trump proposes a "massive advertising campaign" as part of his administration's response to the opioid epidemic killing thousands annually.

More than 2,500 people died of overdoses in 2014 in Ohio, the same year Republican Gov. John Kasich launched his anti-substance abuse "Start Talking" campaign encouraging parents and adults to talk to children about the dangers of drugs and other substances.

Last year, Ohio's numbers jumped to 4,050 [overdose](#) deaths, many attributable to heroin and deadly synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

Ohio launched a \$200,000 campaign in 2016 urging drug users' relatives and friends and other members of the public to know the signs of an overdose and obtain an antidote.

Next month, the state launches "Take Charge Ohio," a \$1 million public awareness campaign targeting prescribers, their patients and the public. The campaign will include TV, radio, newspaper and online ads, along with billboards, social media postings and targeted emails.

The approach "is closely aligned with Ohio's comprehensive initiatives to fight prescription pain medication abuse," said Eric Wandersleben, a

spokesman for the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Experts say the key to successful campaigns are approaches that produce changes in behavior, not just an emotional reaction. Above all, avoid scare tactics.

"Substance abuse is much more complicated than a simple choice of yes or no," said Lori Criss, [chief executive officer](#) of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers.

Richie Webber, an ex-addict who survived a fentanyl overdose three years ago, speaks as often as possible to schoolchildren. He believes relating his experience—a prescription painkiller addiction leading to heroin—is more effective than the widely derided "Just Say No" campaign of a generation ago.

"When you actually have a lived experience, you kind of explain things, rather than just saying, 'Hey, drugs are bad. Don't do them,'" Webber said.

Among other Ohio campaigns:

— "All Roads Lead to Home," a public awareness campaign in development including an opioid addiction treatment website and a mobile app.

— Ohio-targeted radio and TV ads provided by the national Partnership for Drug-Free Kids. Most recent ads focus on awareness and prevention of opioid addiction.

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