

Ohio seeks technology ideas to solve national opioid crisis

October 18 2017, by Julie Carr Smyth

Ohio launched an \$8 million effort Wednesday to attract ideas for using technology to solve the national opioid addiction crisis that has touched scores of families, including that of Columbus mother Jacqueline Lewis, who said solutions can't come too soon.

During a news conference announcing the Ohio Opioid Technology Challenge, Lewis detailed her 29-year-old son's struggle with addiction to painkillers and heroin. She said she supports any effort that encourages understanding that addiction is a disease, not a choice.

"To me, what this is all about is the possibilities with this in educating and raising that awareness and seeing all the entities coming together. That is so necessary," she said. "It's like a village raising the children. You need that; you need everybody in the same boat."

Ohio is pitching the challenge globally. It's similar in its mission to an effort the NFL used to generate new ideas to diagnose and prevent concussions.

It was launched after Republican Ohio Gov. John Kasich used his State of the State speech this year to call on the state's Third Frontier Commission to provide funding to help accelerate scientific and technological breakthroughs that could help solve the U.S. opioid problem. Ohio is among the hardest hit U.S. states.

Development Services Director David Goodman, who chairs the

commission, said the challenge is exciting and original.

"This is a tool, an opportunity to have a forum with folks from all over the world, the billions of people that live on this planet who are aware of this and who have that light bulb go off in their head: 'I have this idea, I've told people about it, I don't know what to do with it,'" Goodman said. "Now you have a tool to use."

The challenge will roll out in three phases: the idea, challenge and product stages.

The idea generation phase begins immediately and lasts through Dec. 15. It allows both technical and non-technical audiences—researchers, caregivers, entrepreneurs and civilians alike—to submit their unique concepts. Ideas are being accepted through a dedicated website established for the project.

Up to five ideas deemed to have the highest likelihood of leading to a solution to the opioid abuse and addiction crisis that's ravaged the nation will be selected for cash awards of \$10,000. Forty runners-up—20 civilians and 20 technical professionals or experts—will be entered into a drawing to win \$500 cash prizes.

Winning ideas will be advanced during the second and third phases. Keith Jenkins, opioid programs director of the Third Frontier Commission, said \$6.5 million will be invested during those phases to start. Corporations are being solicited to add additional money to the challenge.

NineSigma North America CEO Andy Zynga, whose firm was selected to run the challenge, said such contests are known to encourage ideas across industries.

He said the Head Health Challenge launched by the NFL, GE and Under Armour generated some 1,000 ideas that included new helmet safety technologies developed from plastics and medical devices resembling "tricorders like on Star Trek" that could scan for brain injuries.

"Who knows? There may be a technology from food and beverage that has high-impact polymers that can be used for something like this," he said. "Breakthroughs are shown to happen when you have technologies from other domains that are applied in different ways in the innovators' domain."

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Citation: Ohio seeks technology ideas to solve national opioid crisis (2017, October 18) retrieved 15 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-10-ohio-technology-ideas-national-opioid.html>

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