



Paul A. Pettit, MSL, CPH
Public Health Director

**GENESEE COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**
3837 West Main Street Rd.
Batavia, NY 14020
(585) 344-2580 x5555

**ORLEANS COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**
14016 State Route 31, Suite 101
Albion, NY 14411
(585) 589-3278

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Kaitlin Pettine, MPH, MCHES®
Director of Health Promotion/Public Information Officer
Kaitlin.Pettine@co.genesee.ny.us

Paul Pettit, MSL
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“There is Hope!” HEALing Community Study (HCS) Launches Medication for Opioid Use Disorder Education Campaign in Genesee County

No matter who we are or where we come from, we all know at least one person affected by opioid use disorder. Since 2018, there have been 59 fatal opioid overdoses in Genesee County, with 16 additional deaths still pending official causes of death as of February 2023. In 2021, Genesee County experienced at least 9 fatal opioid overdoses (16.6 per 100,000).

But there is hope! Opioid use disorder is a type of substance use disorder and chronic brain disease that occurs when people continue to use opioids despite negative consequences. Like many other chronic diseases, opioid use disorder can be managed with medications like buprenorphine, naltrexone, and methadone that reduce withdrawal symptoms, cravings and decrease the risk for relapse and overdose death. However, stigma and the fear of being judged or discriminated against keeps people with opioid use disorder from seeking the medication they need to support their recovery.

To address this challenge, the Genesee County Health Department, Genesee/Orleans Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (GCASA) and other community partners will implement the second of three communications campaigns from March 6 - May 5, 2023 to help:

- Increase understanding of medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) and
- Reduce stigma that impacts people with the disease from seeking medical care.

A HEALing Communities Study spokesperson, Scott, had taken MOUD for several years as part of his recovery path. Today, he has stayed on track for more than three years without medication assistance.

During an interview led by study staff, Scott provided details of his extensive struggles with substances, including heroin and fentanyl. He also emphasized the importance of

medication such as methadone and suboxone. Scott, who has turned his life around and now is a certified recovery peer advocate in Rochester, calls upon his own experience as a “message of hope” for others struggling with opioid use disorder.

“Medication maintenance in recovery can give people a chance to start their journey to sobriety,” he said, “because sometimes people can’t just stop.” His advice to others is to not give up because MOUD does work.

“Medication is a vital component to treatment. Anybody can be successful with the right program and support and can maintain a successful life. I don’t know where I would be without MOUD,” he said.

“We are so thankful to all of the spokespersons who have shared their powerful stories about their recovery journey and how they have overcome challenges to seek medication for opioid use disorder to support their recovery,” said Charlene Grimm, member of the GOW Opioid Task Force HEALing workgroup. “Their stories continue to save lives by inspiring people with opioid use disorder to stay on medication as long as needed.”

About the HEALing Communities Study

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) estimates that 2.1 million Americans have opioid use disorder, yet fewer than 20% of those receive specialty care in a given year. New York State has one of the highest rates of opioid overdose deaths in the nation. A menu of evidence-based practices (EBPs) exists, including opioid overdose education and naloxone distribution programs, prescription opioid safety, FDA-approved medications for opioid use disorder, behavioral therapies, and recovery support services. Unfortunately, these EBPs have largely failed to penetrate community settings.

As a result, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) launched the HEALing Communities Study (HCS) to identify the EBPs that are most effective at the local level in preventing and treating OUD. The goal of the study is to reduce opioid-related overdose deaths by 40 percent. The first phase of the study, which ended June 30, 2022, occurred in Cayuga, Columbia, Greene, Erie, Lewis, Putnam, Suffolk, and Ulster Counties. The second phase of the study will now run through December 2023 in Broome, Chautauqua, Cortland, Genesee, Monroe, Orange, Sullivan, and Yates counties. In support of this work, Genesee County is collaborating with local partners in a new workgroup of the Genesee- Orleans- Wyoming (GOW) Opioid Task Force to launch three communications campaigns:

1. Naloxone-Fentanyl Education (occurred 10/3/2022-12/2/2022)
2. MOUD Anti-Stigma & Awareness (3/6/2023-5/5/2023)
3. MOUD Treatment Retention (8/7/2023-10/6/2023)

To learn more about the HEALing Communities Study and to help end overdoses in Genesee County, visit:

- HEALing Communities Study Website: www.HealTogetherNY.org/Genesee
- GOW Opioid Task Force Website: www.gowopioidtaskforce.org/
- GO Health Facebook: www.facebook.com/GOHealthNY

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