



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WNC government leaders, health advocates join forces to assemble overdose-reversal kits

Vaya Health and the N.C. Harm Reduction Coalition to distribute 1,200 kits throughout WNC

August 22, 2017 – State Sen. Terry Van Duyn joined health advocates and county commissioners from throughout western North Carolina on Tuesday to begin assembling 1,200 opioid overdose-reversal kits containing information on how to get help locally for addiction and substance use disorders.

Each kit contains two doses of NARCAN® nasal spray funded through a grant to Vaya Health, a regional public managed healthcare organization. Members of Vaya's County commissioner Advisory Board assembled kits by hand that contained NARCAN®, also known as naloxone, along with information on Vaya's 24/7 Access to Care line, which connects individuals to treatment and assists callers experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis.

The N.C. Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC) will distribute the kits throughout the region, at no cost to residents.

"The opioid epidemic and overdose crisis have hit WNC especially hard," said state Sen. Terry Van Duyn. "It's exciting to see government leaders from throughout the region come together to take hands-on action to help our local communities and the people we serve."

Vaya CEO Brian Ingraham said, "Naloxone not only reverses a potentially fatal overdose of heroin or prescription painkillers – for many people, surviving an overdose leads to seeking treatment for substance use. We want to make sure people know that help is available in WNC and support our friends, family members and neighbors as they pursue recovery."

In the last four years, naloxone has reversed more than 800 potentially fatal overdoses in Asheville alone. During that time, only one city in the state – Wilmington – saw more reported reversals. Studies have found that making naloxone available does not lead to more drug use or riskier drug use. In fact, because naloxone causes unpleasant opiate withdrawal symptoms when used to reverse an overdose, it can help prevent future drug use.

State Sen. Jim Davis of Macon, a primary sponsor of the Senate's version of the STOP Act to reduce unnecessary opioid painkiller prescriptions, said his thoughts on naloxone use have changed dramatically in recent years.

“As a conservative Republican, I once thought reversing overdoses using naloxone enabled people instead of empowering them,” Davis said. “But the data proved me wrong. Naloxone is saving lives and pushing people toward treatment. It’s helping families and saving money at the same time.”

Federal statistics show that 91 Americans die each day from an opioid overdose, a four-fold increase since 1999. From 1999 to 2016, more than 12,000 North Carolinians died from opioid-related overdoses, with especially high overdose rates in large parts of the mountains and foothills.

NARCAN® is used for the emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdoses and can be administered by any person, in any location, while awaiting emergency assistance. Last year, Vaya partnered with the NCHRC to use \$100,000 in Vaya community reinvestment funds to distribute NARCAN® kits throughout 23 counties in western North Carolina.

In partnership with the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Vaya recently received \$180,000 of NARCAN® through AdaptPharma for its participation in June’s 2017 Opioid Misuse and Overdose Prevention Summit. The kits assembled Tuesday evening at Vaya’s Asheville office were made possible through the grant.

NARCAN® is effective in reversing overdoses due to heroin and prescription painkillers such as OxyContin and Fentanyl. It does not affect overdoses due to tranquilizers such as Xanax, stimulants or alcohol. If you would like to receive a NARCAN® kit, email the Asheville-based Steady Collective at steady@thesteadycollective.org or visit www.thesteadycollective.org for information on pick-up locations and dates. Or, residents may call the NCHRC at 910-795-7984.

Western North Carolina residents seeking information on mental health or substance use treatment, or help in a crisis, may call Vaya’s toll-free, 24/7 Access to Care line at 1-800-849-6127.

The public is also invited to join Vaya, community partners and advocates for the 3rd Annual Western Regional Recovery Rally from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 9, at Lake Junaluska. For more information on the rally, call 1-800-893-6246, ext. 1157, or email richie.tannerhill@vayahealth.com.

About Vaya Health

Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 23 North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to services and crisis help are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at www.vayahealth.com.

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