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Apr. 26, 2023

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Vaya Health Increases Local Access to Lifesaving NARCAN, as North Carolina Continues to Face Debilitating Opioid Epidemic

ASHEVILLE, NC - North Carolina communities are facing a growing crisis - the opioid epidemic. With overdose deaths rising by double digits last year, families and communities are left devastated. But there is new hope through increased access to a lifesaving drug that reverses the effect. NARCAN, an opioid overdose reversal medication, has recently been approved for over-the-counter use making it easier for individuals to access a life-saving solution to a surging epidemic.

According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina has seen a significant increase in opioid-related deaths in recent years. [In 2022, North Carolina saw a 22% increase in overdose-related deaths](#), a number expected to grow as communities rush to find solutions.

One organization leading the charge in combating the opioid epidemic in North Carolina is Vaya Health, a regional Managed Care Organization (LME/MCO) currently serving over 30 counties. With the increased need for NARCAN prevalent, Vaya Health has kept the NARCAN supply in stock to ensure that the communities they serve have access to this life-saving resource.

NARCAN, the nasal spray form of naloxone, is designed to be easily administered by non-medical personnel, such as police officers or family members of someone at risk of overdose. The nasal spray allows for quick and easy administration of the medication, without the need

for a needle or injection. Naloxone is an opioid antagonist and binds to the same receptors in the brain as opioids without producing the same effects. By binding to these receptors, naloxone can quickly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, including slowed breathing and loss of consciousness.

As the first organization in the state to bring NARCAN to North Carolina in 2016, Vaya Health's efforts against the epidemic have made them a leader in the industry, providing support, resources, and treatment to those in need. Vaya initially purchased 1,450 cases of NARCAN and allocated them to over 100 different providers, and recently purchased an additional 309 cases. By partnering with local organizations and community-based initiatives, Vaya ensures NARCAN is distributed effectively and efficiently.

"The opioid epidemic is not just a crisis, it is a devastating reality affecting families and communities across our state. We at Vaya Health are committed to ensuring that the communities, and people, we serve have the resources they need to fight against opioid-use and potential overdoses," said Donald Reuss, Vaya Health Vice President of BH/IDD Network Operations. "As long as there is a need in North Carolina, Vaya will continue to do everything in our power to supply local healthcare providers, first responders, and communities with access to this life-saving medication."

In addition to increasing access to NARCAN, Vaya also offers a range of services to support individuals, and their families, impacted by substance use, including; medication-assisted treatment, counseling and peer support.

"The FDA's decision to make NARCAN available over-the-counter has the potential to save countless lives throughout North Carolina, not only through increasing access but empowering members of local communities to take action in the face of an overdose," stated Dr. Richard Zenn, Vaya Health Chief Medical Officer.

If you, or someone you know, is struggling with opioid use, don't wait. Contact Vaya Health's Behavioral Health Crisis Hotline today to learn more about available resources and services at **1-800-849-6127**.

About Vaya Health

Vaya Health is a specialty managed care organization that oversees publicly funded behavioral health and intellectual/developmental disability services across a 31-county region of North Carolina. Vaya manages Medicaid, federal, state and local funding to meet member and community needs while advancing whole-person health. Together with our members, provider

network and local partners, we're moving forward to a healthier North Carolina. Access to crisis assistance is available 24/7 at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at vayahealth.com.

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