

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Washington County providing lifesaving naloxone kits to those at risk of overdose July 26, 2019

Washington County Health and Human Services (HHS) is working with the Washington County Sheriff's Office and other County departments to distribute naloxone kits at no cost to those with the highest risk of opioid overdose. Naloxone (brand name Narcan) is a lifesaving medicine that reverses an opioid overdose.

"The purpose of the project is to reduce opioid overdose deaths by making naloxone more accessible," says Amy Manchester Harris, supervisor for Washington County's Disease Control and Prevention program. "In addition to two doses of naloxone, which is provided in an easy-to-use nasal spray, the kits also include educational materials and resources for treatment."

The department is distributing 660 kits to the Washington County Jail, Community Corrections, Parole and Probation, and Juvenile Services. "We are so appreciative of the collaboration and support of the Sheriff's Office and our other County partners," says Manchester Harris. "Partnering with these County departments allows us to lessen opioid-related harms in the most effective manner," says Manchester Harris.

In 2017, 193 people died from an opioid overdose in the tri-county region. Of those, 36 were in Washington County. The number of emergency department and urgent care visits for non-fatal opioid overdoses increased in Washington County in 2017 and 2018.

Lieutenant Tristan Sundsted of the Washington County Sheriff's Office says the jail is excited to provide naloxone kits to inmates when they are released. "The Washington County Jail has been distributing the grant-funded naloxone kits for several months and has already received positive feedback from inmates who have been released with the kits," says Sundsted.

The jail's health care provider recently shared a success story related to the naloxone kit program. A community doctor says one of his patients had recently been in the Washington County Jail on drug charges. After using heroin and methamphetamines for several years, the man was given a naloxone kit when he was released from jail. He had never had access to his own naloxone before, even though he'd previously suffered from several overdoses. The man is now in the process of recovery and identifies getting the naloxone kit from the jail as the main reason for his positive outlook.



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“Working with our County partners, we believe the distribution of these kits will help reduce inmates returning to jail, keep inmates safe as they transition back into our community, and reinforce the Sheriff’s Office’s commitment to being the safest urban county in Oregon,” says Sundsted.

Making naloxone available to those at high risk for overdose is just one part of Washington County’s larger strategy of harm reduction and engagement in substance use disorder treatment. Other services include the newly adopted drug takeback ordinance, medically supported recovery, a peer-led drop-in recovery center currently in development, and a new mobile van for infectious disease testing and syringe exchange.

“Harm reduction initiatives seek to create a healthier community by reducing the harms associated with certain behaviors and honoring a person’s readiness for change,” says Erin Parrish, Washington County’s harm reduction program coordinator. “For people who inject drugs, the ability to avoid drug-related death and disease is directly related to their ability to access harm reduction services.”

Funding for this initiative was made possible through a tri-county grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This media release is available at <https://www.co.washington.or.us/HHS/News/naloxone-kits.cfm>.

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