

[Upbeat Music]

**Female VO:**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration presents, “The Road to Recovery”. This program aims to raise awareness about Mental and Substance Use disorders. Highlight the effectiveness of treatment and recovery services and show that people can and do recover. Today’s program is The Road To Recovery- Taking on the Opioid Crisis. Aligning Federal, State and local responses.

Matt Clune, Public Health Advisor, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Rockville, Maryland.

**Matt Clune:**

Welcome. I am Matt Clune, your host today. A SAMHSA Public Health Advisor and a person in long-term recovery.

During this program, we will discuss the current opioid epidemic in America. We'll look at the federal, state, and local programs that are effectively addressing this issue. Our panel of experts today will speak about creative strategies being utilized around the country that are helping to tackle this widespread problem and what critical next steps communities can take.

Joining in our panel today is Spencer Clark, a Public Health Advisor, Division of Pharmacological Therapies, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment at SAMHSA, Mayor Steve Williams, the mayor of Huntington, West Virginia, who some consider to be the ground zero for the opioid epidemic.

Evan Figueroa-Vargas is the program manager for the Mental Health Partnerships, PeerNet, Homeless Specialty in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and lastly, we are joined by Dr. Charmaine Yoest, Director of External Affairs at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Dr. Yoest, I'd like to turn to you about this. What exactly are opioids for the public's knowledge and why are they typically prescribed and what are the risk factors?

**Charmaine Yoest:**

Matt, I'm really glad that you started with that question because one of the biggest problems that we're facing right now in the opioid crisis is what we're calling an information under load. People don't really fully understand what it is we're confronting with the crisis.

Opioids are pain medication that are derived from the poppy plant and they've been around for millennia, but we've seen an explosion in prescriptions of opioids over the last couple decades when we had a trend that changed in America towards seeing pain as the fifth vital sign. So, doctors started prescribing it more and more and Americans didn't necessarily realize that this was a trend and that it was something that they needed to be paying close attention to.

You know, we think about opioids probably most people know that something like morphine is an opioid, but when you go to the dentist and you have a tooth taken out and they give you Percocet, that's an opioid and so, we're seeing situations like where a doctor will give someone after a dental procedure 30 Percocet. Well, you might not necessarily need quite that many Percocet given the fact that it does have addictive qualities and what we're seeing now in terms of the epidemic and the fact that why the president has declared this a public health emergency is we're seeing over 115 people a day. 115 people a day in America dying from this. So, imagine if we had a small airplane crash every single day in America what our reaction would be.

**Matt Clune:**

Thank you so much for that.

Spencer, I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about opioid misuse and how that sometimes trends into opioid use disorder.

**Spencer Clark:**

The type of patient that Dr. Yoest just spoke of, they may be beginning to use it on the base of a prescription from a physician to treat a pain condition and find over a period of time that their use has become a dependent use where they are using more than was prescribed by the physician or for a longer period of time and they're beginning to have other effects. Withdrawal effects when they are not using, it begins to interfere with other parts of their lives. Addiction is when a condition is interfering with life functions that we all are responsible for, home, school, family, relationships, all those things and addiction interferes with all of those.

**Matt Clune:**

I'd like to direct our next question to Mayor Williams of Huntington, West Virginia. We all know, lay person, professionals alike, that the opioid epidemic has become a public health emergency and we know that you're feeling it in your town and I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that.

**Mayor Steve Williams:**

Frankly, this has become such an issue in Huntington. Three years ago, I started having individuals writing me, sending me emails, stopping me on the street saying, somebody needs to do something, please. We're losing our neighborhood.

Frankly, I always thought it was a law enforcement problem. The long and short of it is, is that we stepped out very aggressively from a law enforcement standpoint and over a 90 day period arrested over 200 people and frankly, we thought, I was thinking, those guys know not to come into my town now, but they just kept coming and I started to realize and understood firsthand that you can't arrest your way out of this is that we had a serious problem of addiction in our community that we needed to address and that we needed to start focusing on saving lives, harm reduction, getting people towards treatment, creating those opportunities where we got the entire community, the entire community,

involved because frankly, what I keep saying to folks in our community is that every one of us has to take ownership of this, everyone.

**Matt Clune:**

Thanks so much.

Evan, We know that some folks are more vulnerable to addiction than others and from my knowledge, I've seen a greater prevalence of opioid use disorder among those with mental health illnesses or disorders or those inclined to addictive disorders. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about that.

**Evan Figueroa-Vargas:**

Yeah, absolutely. I think some of the challenges is barriers to accessing mental health services and as a result, I believe that at times individuals end up self-medicating themselves as a result of, you know, having some challenges.

What I see specifically in the Latino community, there's a language gap or language barrier there, so again, with those challenges of accessing behavioral health services in the city of Philadelphia, individuals end up using narcotics and kind of self-medicate.

**Matt Clune:**

When we return, we will discuss the widespread issue of opioid addition and how all members of our communities are affected.

[Upbeat Music]

**Female VO:**

The Counseling Center Incorporated. Stepping Stones Program, Portsmouth, Ohio.

Andy Albrecht, CEO

**Andy Albrecht:**

We are a substance abuse and mental health treatment agency that's located in Southern Ohio. Currently now, we operate in three counties, which is Adams, Lawrence, and Scioto counties. Within those counties, we have a wide variety of programming, both inpatient and outpatient. Stepping Stones is a small part of the counseling center, but it's also a very, very important part of The Counseling Center. Stepping Stones Program focuses on women with children, also emphasizes on pregnant women as they go through their addiction related disorders.

**Female VO:**

Theresa Ruby, Nurse Manager/Maternity Services. Southern Ohio Medical Center, Portsmouth, Ohio

**Theresa Ruby:**

Stepping Stones is a residential housing organization for mothers who are expecting and have an opportunity to bring another child. They're allowed to have two children live in the residential home with them while being pregnant and then there's an outpatient service that they offer to the mothers who are not ready for residential services, but can receive some counseling on the outside on a regular basis.

**Female VO:**

Andy Albrecht

**Andy Albrecht:**

One of the things that makes Stepping Stones very special and unique is our daycare programming. We allow children to enter the program that are 12 years and under. We also have newborn babies here on site, newly born infants that we're very proud of that are also drug free.

**Female VO:**

Theresa Ruby

**Theresa Ruby:**

We offer a education opportunity for those moms similar to childbirth education. It talks about what they can expect when they come in to deliver. It talks about what care them and their baby will be receiving and it kinda alleviates some of their fears.

**Female VO:**

Trudy King, Mother/Person in Recovery

**Trudy King:**

I've been in the Stepping Stones for about 60 days. When I came here, I've made some of the best friends that I probably will ever have. They don't want anything from you except for you to get better.

**Female VO:**

Cathy Newman, Former Participant & Counselor, Stepping Stones

**Cathy Newman:**

The most important thing that I gained by participating in the Stepping Stones Program was an ability to live a different life and I gained sober sisters. I gained new people in my life that were healthy instead of the unhealthy relationships that I had.

**Female VO:**

Trudy King

**Trudy King:**

We have counselors that are on site. We do individual counseling, mental health peer support. They offer a lot of different types of recovery paths.

**Female VO:**

Megan Whisman, Family Nurse Practitioner, Compass Community Health, Portsmouth, Ohio

**Megan Whisman:**

Well, through the medication assisted treatment, initially it helps patients with withdrawal symptoms, so it helps alleviate some of those discomforts that they're having in the beginning. In the beginning, the medication is the biggest piece to keep them here. It alleviates the withdrawal symptoms enough for them to be able to go to group, to focus and learn the things that they need to learn to live a sober life.

**Female VO:**

Andy Albrecht

**Andy Albrecht:**

The opioid epidemic over the last decade has really had a huge impact on the counseling center and also a huge impact on our local community. What The Counseling Center has done to try to respond to that horrific problem within our community is to try to develop access points for people that need drug and alcohol treatment.

**Female VO:**

Theresa Ruby

**Theresa Ruby:**

The services that Stepping Stones provide to our mothers and to their unborn child in regards to the opioid disease is tremendous. It really gives them a beginning foundation that maybe they didn't have before of coping, being able to cope with stressors that are around us every day and begin to put into place some of those mechanisms that make them feel like a whole person again.

**Female VO:**

Trudy King

**Trudy King:**

One of the reasons I've stayed here is because this is one of the best things to ever happen in my life. This is an amazing program for mothers and children.

**Female VO:**

You might not know everyone in your community, but if you did, you'd see that people in recovery from mental and substance use disorders are all around. Reach out for support and begin your recovery journey. Join the Voices for Recovery. Strengthen families and communities.

**Male VO:**

For confidential information on mental and substance use disorders, including prevention and treatment referrals for you or someone you know, call 1-800-662-HELP. Brought to you by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

**Female VO:**

Matt Clune, Public Health Advisor, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Rockville, Maryland.

**Matt Clune:**

Hello and welcome back to "The Road to Recovery". How does opioid use disorder impact families, communities and society? I'd like to start out immediately with Dr. Yoest of ONDCP and talk a little bit about illicit fentanyl and what role that has to play in the opioid epidemic and opioid overdoses specifically.

**Charmaine Yoest:**

Yeah Matt, I'm so glad you bring that up because I think it's really important for us to get the information about fentanyl out there, particularly to young people because they don't necessarily know how potent fentanyl is and how the fact that drug traffickers are using Fentanyl to illicitly lace things that people don't necessarily know that they're getting it. For example, you'll see Xanax, you know, counterfeit Xanax pills that are laced with fentanyl. As a result, fentanyl is driving the increase that we're seeing in opioid deaths.

With the most recent data, we had 42,000 deaths due to opioid in 2016. Fully half of those, 20,000 deaths, were attributable to fentanyl. We do have to be very, very serious about the drug traffickers who are flooding our country with fentanyl and that's one of the reason why the president has been so focused on border issues and prosecution issues. Attorney General Sessions recently announced a new program that's looking very comprehensively at our law enforcement approach to drug trafficking because we need to be so serious about the potency of this drug.

**Matt Clune:**

A number of states and cities around the country have been especially effective in their efforts to combat this public health crisis and I wonder if you might talk a little bit about your own experience in Huntington.

**Mayor Steve Williams:**

In our community, we have mental health specialists, law enforcement officers in plain clothes going within 72 hours after somebody has been, has overdosed, that we go to them and start offering to help them get into treatment.

**Female VO:**

Charmaine Yoest

**Charmaine Yoest:**

One of the components of the president's plan in attacking the opioid crisis is focusing on prison inmates first as they're coming into the prison system, looking to see better screening to find out what their level of addiction is, working with them while they're in prison, but also focusing on them as they're leaving and going back into the community, making sure that they have connections as they leave. Really focusing on that on the ground level of how do you interact with people at an individual level to get them treatment and into recovery.

**Matt Clune:**

Spencer, I'm wondering, I know that SAMHSA has a number of different programs and grantees that are specifically community based are coming up with some of the best innovations come out of our communities and I wonder if you might just pluck one or two that are addressing these.

**Spencer Clark:**

One that's the most exciting is working with patients in the emergency room. Patients that are experiencing overdoses that are being intervened with by medical professionals, having trained counselors or peers that connect with that individual and their family at that crisis opportunity, it is a crisis, but it's also an opportunity, and getting them into treatment and treatment means immediately. That day or the next morning. Not two weeks, not three weeks away and ensuring that that person has ability to negotiate into the treatment system, they get that assessment, they usually get MAT, medication assisted treatment, right away and they are on the road to recovery immediately.

**Matt Clune:**

Thank you, Spencer.

When we return, we'll discuss how behavioral health institutions and the recovery community specifically are involved in the solution.

[Upbeat Music]

**Female VO:**

Evan Figueroa-Vargas, Program Manager, Peer Net, Homeless Specialty, Mental Health Partnerships, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Evan Figueroa-Vargas:**

Back in 2011, I found myself incarcerated at a jail in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I had been in and out of jail for the last several years as a direct result of my addiction to opiates, specifically prescription pain medication, but in 2011, I found myself once again sitting in a jail cell, withdrawn from opiate withdrawal, and right then and there I knew I had to make a decision. I needed to make some changes in my life and I didn't like the way I was feeling, I didn't like the person who I had become. Starting on that day, I just started to make a plan on what I wanted to do when I got back out to society. While I was at intensive outpatient program, I started to make a plan for myself and one of the challenges that I had at the time was that I didn't have any formal education. So, I said to myself, you know, step one should be not only to start to overcome my opiate addiction, but to do something around my education and I said to myself, you know, I would also like to be a social worker at some point and so I am currently enrolled, working on obtaining my master's in social work at Widener University. So, I currently work at Mental Health Partnerships on a CABHI grant funded by SAMHSA through the state. The program that I work on is to benefit chronically homeless individuals in the city of Philadelphia. I feel like I'm making a difference in the city of Philadelphia in the life of others.

**Female VO:**

Matt Clune

**Matt Clune:**

Thanks for joining us again. During this segment of the panel, we'd like to focus on what are some evidence-based treatments that are out there and available for opioid use disorder and specifically, I'd like to kick off by focusing on what's known as medication assisted treatment. Spencer, if you might take a moment and enlighten us on what MAT is all about.

**Spencer Clark:**

Medication-Assisted Treatment is using one of three FDA approved medications, those being methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone to assist a patient in their recovery. Medication assisted treatment includes psychosocial treatments and recovery support. So, it's really a three-pronged effort. Medication allows a person to begin to experience recovery when they're not experiencing cravings and withdrawal effects and really able to begin to focus on other life skills. The psychosocial supports help them do that and the recovery supports can be a lifelong challenge for that individual to have supports to continue a life of sobriety.

**Matt Clune:**

Evan, I understand there's some misconceptions out there in the community, particularly the recovery community around MAT and is it really sobriety and I wonder if you might dig into that question a little bit.

**Evan Figueroa-Vargas:**

Absolutely. So, I do believe there's some stigma associated with the use of medication assisted treatment. As a pathway to recovery, some individuals do not believe that people are fully in recovery as a result of being on medication assisted treatment. However, I would say that I've witnessed many of my peers succeed and thrive in recovery as a result and the data shows it. Right? The research shows that medication assisted treatment works. So, yeah. So, there's a lot of stigma. We need to inform. Everything's an education. We need to educate individuals of how effective medication assisted treatment truly is.

**Matt Clune:**

Absolutely. We've heard that a wide distribution of naloxone, more detox beds, those are the kinds of things that can help us address folks who are falling through the cracks and not making it to the front door of the treatment program.

**Evan Figueroa-Vargas:**

So, one thing to be aware of is that not everybody is ready nor willing to accept substance use treatment at this time. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that they need to die. Right? We need to keep them alive long enough. So, I did serve on the mayor's task force to address the opiate epidemic in Philadelphia, a city that has seen 1,200 preventable deaths in the year of 2017.

The city has done a good job at distributing 20,000 sets of Naloxone, which is one of many name brands. In fact, two weeks after I was trained on the use of naloxone back in November, two weeks after that I was on my way home commuting from work and I saw an individual motionless out on the street. My training kicked in, I dialed 9-1-1, I administered a dose of naloxone. Sure enough, by the time the EMT got there, this individual's back on his feet and you know, he gets to fight another day and you know, to that I say, you know, the first step to entering recovery is staying alive. Right? So, if you're not alive, you can't enter recovery.

**Matt Clune:**

Thanks so much for sharing that. We didn't home in too much on detox beds and what happens in a detox for the general public's knowledge. How does MAT get introduced in a detox? That kind of thing. I wonder if you might share.

**Female VO:**

Spencer Clark

**Spencer Clark:**

Well, I think we start out by saying detox alone is not treatment. Detox is an invitation to treatment. It's an invitation for a person to get into MAT or other evidence-based care. It is the place where many people start, but detox alone is not gonna be a sufficient recovery program for them. We really believe that MAT is an extremely effective method, that as I mentioned before, there are three different drugs that can be used and people can experience very quick responses to where they are on the path to recovery almost immediately, which is a really, really powerful change in their lives.

**Matt Clune:**

Next, we're gonna talk about strategies and resources and really hone in on what that whole framework looks like. That includes prevention.

[Upbeat Music]

**Female VO:**

Christopher M. Jones, Director, National Mental Health & Substance Use Policy Laboratory, Substance Use & Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Rockville, Maryland

**Christopher M. Jones:**

The opioid crisis continues to worsen in the United States. In 2016, more than 11 million Americans misused prescription opioids. Nearly 1 million used heroin and 2.1 million people had an opioid use disorder. At the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, we've developed a five point strategy to combat the opioid epidemic. The strategy aims to strengthen public health data reporting and collection, improve access to prevention treatment and recovery support services, target the availability and distribution of overdose reversing drugs like Naloxone, support cutting edge research on pain and addiction, and advance the practice of pain management. Here at SAMHSA, we work closely with other agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services as well as with the White House and other departments to advance efforts to combat the opioid crisis. Giving people access to information on treatment options is a key first step to entering treatment and recovery.

Last year, SAMHSA launched a new online tool, Decisions in Recovery, treatment for opioid use disorder which helps people with opioid use disorder learn about using medication assisted treatment options to strengthen their recovery. SAMHSA is also looking for ways to support the use of technology and telemedicine to expand their reach to underserved areas.

SAMHSA's MAT-PDOA grant program helps states to improve access to opioid addiction treatment. Some states are using this funding to establish telehealthcare in rural communities. There is great interest in exploring the potential of technology assisted monitoring and treatment for high risk patients and patients with a substance use disorder. SAMHSA is committed to working with our partners and patients in order to meet the needs of individuals with a substance use disorder and those living in long-term recovery.

**Female VO:**

For more information on national recovery month, to find out how to get involved, or to locate an event near you, visit the recovery month website at [recoverymonth.gov](http://recoverymonth.gov).

Matt Clune

**Matt Clune:**

Welcome back. What are some programs and resources on opioid use disorder available from SAMHSA and other federal agencies for behavioral health practitioners, providers, and consumers?

**Matt Clune:**

Spencer, I'd like to turn to you on some of the things that are happening at SAMHSA and that you're aware of federally around the use of pain management regulations that can help docs who've been given a license to prescribe regulate their distribution a little bit more safely.

**Spencer Clark:**

There's a lot of effort going on across the country in training professionals and bringing guidelines to bear such that they are engaging in safer practices, they're more compassionate looking at individuals that do cross over into the addiction area and getting those individuals into treatment. This is really, really important. There are individuals who legitimately experience both pain and addiction and they need both kinds of care.

**Matt Clune:**

Dr. Yoest, we've hit on some prevention strategies, we've hit on some treatment strategies, and some recovery support service strategies. Within that broad rubric, are there some things that you'd like to highlight that you think we're missing?

**Charmaine Yoest:**

Well, what if I mention some resources that the federal government has that people can access so that they can kind of check out some things on their own. SAMSHA is part of the federal Department of Health and Human Services and HHS as it's called and HHS has a website that is devoted to the opioid crisis and there's a place on that website where you can type in your zip code and find resources that are near you and then the White House also has a website called [opioids.gov](http://opioids.gov) which is meant to give an overarching view of the three different legs of the stool, the prevention, the decreasing supply, and the recovery and treatment. So, those are some resources where if people, going back to how we started that there's an information under load, I would just challenge people to really become educated on this crisis, particularly parents as there will be resources available from SAMHSA and HHS and other places in the government of how parents can talk to their children and reach out in the community and get involved and I liked what Steve said, everybody's going to have a role and people are going to have different parts of this crisis that they'll plug into.

**Female VO:**

Spencer Clark

**Spencer Clark:**

There's a treatment locator guide that allows a person to seek behavioral health treatment by zip code just like you mentioned, there are also enormous publications that are free publications that are downloadable electronically or hard copies from SAMHSA. Everything from guides to parents to treatment professionals to patients themselves. There's a whole host of things that are available at the tip of your fingers.

**Female VO:**

Evan Figueroa-Vargas

**Evan Figueroa-Vargas:**

For the individual sitting at home watching this. Right? For the mother, the parent, the person whose ready to give up on their child, getting ready to give up on their spouse, I will say, don't give up on them, man. Hang in there. My mother hung in there for me, my girlfriend at the time who is today my wife, she hung in there for me and that absolutely made the difference. That made a difference in my recovery that somebody was hopeful, you know, and somebody believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself.

**Female VO:**

Charmaine Yoest

**Charmaine Yoest:**

I think this is the most powerful part of our entire time here together is hearing your story and giving people hope and as policy people, we want to talk about the data, we wanna look at the facts and the figures, but what really is going to make a difference is focusing on the stories of people like yourself who have persisted and who've found a way out of addiction and into a more abundant life and so, I think that as we share those stories and encourage people who are struggling to come out from behind the shame, the stigma and to reach out and to get the help and by you giving them hope and a way forward in knowing that there is an optimism out there, I think that's the most important thing.

**Female VO:**

The Honorable Steve Williams

**Mayor Steve Williams:**

There's a formula that I've worked in my mind that just, if we follow this, then we find ourselves on the successful side. If you're collaborating, talking with one another, you start to create partnerships. Collaboration and partnerships create trust. Collaboration and partnerships with trust establish hope. All

of this becomes worth it because on the other side, we're a stronger community. That's what recovery is and that makes our nation better.

**Matt Clune:**

Mayor Williams, thanks so much for that message of hope and Spencer, I'd like to turn to you as our SAMHSA official here today and just a final thought from you.

**Spencer Clark:**

Well, one of the words that SAMHSA talks about is treatment works and we know that when people get access to high quality, effective treatment, that their lives can be changed and one of our goals is to ensure that people get that access to treatment and that they can get on the road to recovery as soon as possible.

**Matt Clune:**

This concludes today's episode of "The Road to Recovery" focusing on the opioid crisis. I want to thank our panelist and all of our viewers and listeners for joining us. We've had a marvelous panel today and I want to remind you to celebrate recovery month each September throughout the year. For more information, please visit recovery month website and thank you for joining us today.

[Upbeat Music]

**Female VO:**

To listen to this program or other programs in the *Road to Recovery* series, visit the website at [recoverymonth.gov](http://recoverymonth.gov).