

SPOTLIGHT: Ocean County Prosecutor – Blue Heroin Addiction Recovery & Treatment (HART)



Offering support through treatment, recovery and legal process

Background

In 2013, Joseph Coronato became the prosecutor in Ocean County, New Jersey. Within one week of assuming the role, eight people died of a drug overdose, all of whom were under the age of 28. Shortly thereafter, the prosecutor's office organized a meeting with the 32 Chiefs of Police in Ocean County to have the first of many conversations about how to tackle what Coronato refers to as the "synthetic storm"—an unprecedented crisis that showed no signs of letting up. In 2014, Ocean County became the first county in New Jersey to train every police officer in the administration of Narcan, the overdose reversal drug. Today, every officer, first responder, fire fighter, and middle and high school in the county carries the overdose reversal drug.

Providing officials with Narcan was working to save lives, but not breaking the cycle of substance use disorders (SUD). In January of 2016, Coronato partnered with the two area hospitals to start the Opiate Overdose Response Program (OORP), which connected patients admitted to the emergency department due to an overdose with a recovery coach and nurse navigator to help them get engaged with treatment. The success of this collaboration led the development of Blue HART (Heroin Addiction Recovery & Treatment), which further extended the continuum of community care for those struggling with a SUD, and sought to get people help before the event of an overdose. The program has now expanded to six police departments in Ocean County that act as intake sites for individuals who are struggling with a SUD and want help.

How it Works

Each of the six police intake stations have set days during which their doors are open to individuals in need of treatment for a SUD, and every station within the county will facilitate care 24/7.

"You can't just put someone into a treatment facility, release them and say, 'Listen, if there's a problem, this is the number to call,' because they are going to lose that number, and they are not going to have that relationship. When you have 165 people walking into a police station seeking help instead of walking into a hospital, you know they are looking to make a life change."

– Joseph Coronato, Prosecutor,
Ocean County, NJ

First, participants undergo a background check so that Blue HART can develop a holistic view of their situation and begin tracking their case. Then the participant is linked to a recovery coach and transported by an officer to a partnering clinic where the participant is evaluated by a clinician who determines the proper level of care. The program is designed to address the needs of each individual. No one is turned away and scholarships are available to those in financial need. Because New Jersey lacks an adequate number of treatment beds and long-term options, some participants are sent out-of-state to facilities with which Blue HART has established relationships. Through the use of forfeiture funds, the police department organizes door-to-door transportation to treatment, be it a short drive to a local detox or a plane ticket to a long-term accredited facility in Texas.

Existing criminal charges are postponed during an individual's participation in the program, and can be used as leverage later on in order to motivate individuals to remain in treatment. When participants have successfully completed a treatment program, drug-related charges are most often relieved.

Spotlight Series: *highlighting innovative programs across the nation enacting a comprehensive strategy to address substance use disorders and addiction.*

In this program, Recovery Coaches are people who have been in recovery for at least two years and have been trained to provide mentorship and guidance to Blue HART and OORP participants as they navigate the continuum of care. This constant communication helps the program keep track of participants at every critical step, from the initial assessment through sustained recovery.

All participants engaged in Blue HART sign HIPAA releases to ensure that every provider engaged in their treatment can communicate with one another and make informed decisions regarding the participant's care. (Blue HART receives weekly updates from clinicians on each participant's progress.) This also enables the program to intervene at critical moments when the participant otherwise may have fallen off of the radar. For example, participants who are discharged from intensive treatment to a transitional home can be awarded scholarships in order to help them pay rent in a recovery supportive environment while they find appropriate employment, a task that can take time due to the fact that many participants have criminal records. When participants have successfully completed treatment, they continue to engage with their Recovery Coach, and those with pending criminal charges work with the prosecutor's office to determine the status of their charges.

How it is Innovative

Blue HART seeks to intervene in the progression of a SUD before the event of an overdose and develop long-term relationships that help make sure individuals can access proper treatment and sustain recovery. By getting people the help they need, the program prevents future drug-related crimes and other consequences of SUD. While criminal charges sometimes can act as a barrier to treatment access and recovery, Blue HART braids accountability into productive treatment measures and often relieves or modifies criminal charges once an individual has successfully completed treatment. Creative funding tactics (using forfeiture money and

fundraising with private donors) has enabled Blue HART to make sure every participant who wants help can get it.

Demonstrating Success

Blue HART was officially launched on January 1, 2016. Since then, more than 280 participants have entered the Blue HART program and 175 remain engaged. The program's persistent efforts to curb the opioid epidemic through overdose reversal and critical treatment interventions in Ocean County have been replicated throughout New Jersey and have influenced local measures in other states.

Stakeholders & Partners

The Blue HART program relies upon collaboration and communication between stakeholders at key intervention points along the continuum of treatment and recovery services. Staff in every Ocean County police department are trained to provide assistance to walk-ins. Sunrise Detox, Integrity House, Preferred Behavioral Health, and Ocean Mental Health Services work with Blue HART to provide intake and evaluations. Lifeline Recovery Services provides recovery coaches and long-term support for individuals in recovery from a substance use disorder.

The Future of Blue HART

Currently, recovery coaches are engaged with the program as volunteers. Given the importance of their role in the Blue HART's vision of long-term recovery supports, Coronato hopes to be able to pay recovery coaches for their services to ensure committed and stable engagement. The program also hopes to set up clinics in Ocean County hospitals so that patients admitted for an overdose can be held for 24-48 hours and treated on-site while they are being connected to next steps and detox, which eventually will lead to proper long-term treatment. The Blue HART program plans to continue increasing the number of participating police departments.

Resources & References

The Website: <http://manchesterpolice.nj.com/heroin-addiction-response-program-harp/>