



September 7, 2016

Let's Become the Model Task Force Against Heroin!

The issue of preventing heroin abuse and overdose is such an important topic that I am revisiting it this week. We had a great press conference at the Thompson Center on August 31, which was International Overdose Awareness Day, to introduce the West Side Heroin Task Force and to release a report by Kathryn Kane-Willis, Director of the Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy at Roosevelt University in Chicago. Ms. Kane-Willis' analysis of available data show that the West Side of Chicago is the epicenter of the health problems related to heroin in the state of Illinois. The Roosevelt study found that nearly one out of four hospitalizations for heroin in the whole state occurred on Chicago's West Side, and that the top 4 areas with the highest rates of arrest for the possession of heroin were all located on Chicago's West Side.

The West Side Heroin Taskforce, in partnership with Loretto Hospital, Roosevelt University and dozens of others, was formed to determine strategies to reduce the health and criminal justice consequences of heroin use on West Side residents. The Task Force's mission is to ensure that evidenced-based care and health-centered services are delivered throughout the West Side. We will work with Chicago Police Supt. Eddie Johnson to improve the work of the police to help deal with this problem as a disease to help reduce crime on the West Side. We will also work with the Director of the Illinois State Police Leo P. Schmitz to cut the flow of drugs to and from the West Side of Chicago. The Task Force will do everything it can to start a media campaign on the Eisenhower 290 Expressway and around the West Side to help raise the awareness of this crisis.

We all need to learn more about this issue. What are can increase the risk of abuse of heroin or prescription opioids or narcotics? According to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), there are several situations that increase the risk that someone may use heroin or abuse prescription narcotics:

1. Experiencing mental health disorders (i.e., depression, anxiety, impulsive behavior, thoughts of suicide) is associated with increased risk for prescription opioid misuse and/or dependence
2. Experiencing and having a high level of pain or chronic pain is associated with prescription opioid misuse
3. Having a previous history of alcohol or other drug use and/or abuse increases the likelihood of opioid misuse and/or addiction

4. Having poor health, illness, or injury is related to opioid misuse and abuse
5. Genetic and physiological reactions are associated with increased use, abuse and/or addiction
6. Youth between the ages of 12 to 17 who associate with peers that misuse drugs are at increased risk for prescription drug misuse
7. Experiencing discrimination has been associated with increased prescription drug misuse
8. Personality characteristics, such as cynicism, or a high level of anger toward self and others, are associated with heroin being the “drug of choice”
9. Early onset of tobacco and other drug use has been associated with heroin use.
10. History of poly-drug use, especially combined inhalant and marijuana use, is linked to heroin use
11. Engaging in multiple delinquent behaviors (i.e., getting into serious fights at school or work, engaging in group fighting, carrying guns, selling illicit drugs, stealing, or attacking someone with intent to seriously injure) makes someone more likely to have engaged in heroin use

On the other hand, what are those situations that can protect people from using heroin or abusing prescription narcotics? According to SAMSHA, these include:

1. Committing to do well in school and achieving high school and college degrees are protective against prescription drug misuse and abuse
2. Attending a prevention class is associated with less misuse
3. Having greater perception of substance abuse risks prevents opioid misuse
4. Youth who have a strong parental bond and have parents who disapprove of misuse are less likely to misuse prescription drugs.
5. Community norms against use is associated with lesser prescription drug misuse

We need to work so we all remember those who have been affected by this epidemic of heroin abuse, and we will join together to become the Model Task Force to create solutions for those most impacted by heroin – Chicago’s West Side residents.

Sincerely,



La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District