

Brunswick Coalition to offer prescription medication survey

By Staff Report

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BOLIVIA — The Brunswick Coalition, which has been established to combat prescription drug abuse, plans to circulate a survey through the community to collect data on the use of prescription medications in the county.

The survey, "Brunswick County Partnerships for Success Grant Community Survey," will soon be made available online via surveymonkey.com and will be handed out in focus groups and during one-on-one interviews.

The coalition initially concentrated its efforts on securing a Project Lazarus grant. Project Lazarus is a secular public health nonprofit established in 2008 in response to extremely high drug overdose death rates in Wilkes County, which was four times higher than the state average at the time.

Its founder, Fred Brazon, came to Brunswick County in June 2014 because there has been a significant increase in opioid — or prescription painkiller — poisoning deaths here from 2008 to 2012, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2012, Brunswick County had the most prescription opioid overdose deaths — 18 per 100,000 people — in the region, which includes Bladen, Columbus, New Hanover, Pender and Onslow counties

The coalition is still waiting to hear whether it received the grant, but in the meantime applied for and received a \$100,000 Partnership for Success grant, federal money that is distributed by individual states. Partnership for Success grants are only awarded to communities with high drug overdose rates.

Coalition coordinator Tammy Brunelle, of Coastal Horizons in Wilmington, said the group's primary focus now is meeting with community members and getting their input on the county's prescription medication epidemic.

Diane Edwards, of the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Crossroads, said gathering as much information from as diverse a population in the county as possible is key to the survey.

"We're trying to find ways to talk to people here of all different stripes," she said. "People who've been here a long time, people who haven't been, people of all ages, races and ethnic groups — that is really where the data lies."

Specifically, both Brunelle and Edwards hoped to gather information from the most southern and western reaches of the county. Brunelle added that many parents and grandparents in the area would be good for focus groups or as key informants, as existing data show Brunswick County is a large retirement community.

Brunelle also mentioned that many grandparents in the area are raising their grandchildren, and that many of them don't have the resources they need specifically because they live in a retirement community so far from where their extended family lives.

Once surveys are available to the public, they can be completed and emailed to Brunelle at tbrunelle@coastalhorizons.org or mailed to her at Coastal Horizons Prevention Office, 613 Shipyard Blvd., Suite 104, Wilmington, NC 28412.

"The more questions we ask, the more we dig, the more questions we come up with, and we may get surprises, things we didn't expect," Brunelle said of the survey. "We don't want to do something that doesn't work. We want to meet the needs of Brunswick County, and if the need's not there we don't want to use resources and tax payer dollars if it's not needed."

Brunelle also announced Pride surveys, which were sent to area middle- and high-schoolers, have been completed, with Brunswick Community College also sending out a survey to students ages 18 to 25.

In other business, the coalition has renewed the leases for its two billboards, one at 2618 Ocean Highway 0.1 miles south of Royal Oak Road in Shallotte and another at 7270 U.S. 17 just south of N.C. 87 in Leland.

The last in a series of eight community meetings led by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office throughout the county to address its drug abuse epidemic is set for 7 p.m. Thursday, March 24, at Leland Town Hall. Brunelle said the first of the meetings, held in November, focused specifically on heroin, but they have subsequently since shifted to a broader discussion about prescription overdoses, too.

Brunelle said the first 2016 New Hanover Regional Medical Center medication drop-off event, which is held twice a year, will be April 2 from 9 a.m. to noon. The service will be a drive-thru service, with officials collecting the medications in a container and asking the person dropping them off their zip code and how many people contributed to what is being dropped off.

For those who want to drop off medications before April 2, permanent kiosks are at 1379 River Road SE in Leland, 70 Stamp Act Drive NE in Bolivia, 10176 Beach Drive in Calabash through the sheriff's office, as well as at 125 Division Drive, Leland and 114 E. College Avenue in Boiling Springs Lake, courtesy of those municipal police departments.

Trillium Southern Regional Director Deanna Campbell said an Access to Care kiosk will be available in the Department of Social Services within the next two months. This will allow anyone who sits at the kiosk to answer questions about his or her mental health and access a hotline, if needed, using a phone there. The questionnaire that will be offered at the kiosk is already available online at trilliumhealthresources.org.

The next Brunswick Coalition meeting is scheduled for 3 p.m. Monday, April 18.

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