



Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department



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Contact: **Melissa Morin**, Whatcom County Health Department
mmorin@co.whatcom.wa.us, (360)778-6022
Chris Kobdich, UnityCare NW
chris.kobdich@ucnw.org, (360)788-2624

WHATCOM HAS HOPE: CAMPAIGN SHEDS LIGHT ON OPIOID CRISIS & WHAT YOU CAN DO

BELLINGHAM, WA - The Whatcom County Opioid Response Task Force is launching a new community education campaign designed to provide information about opioid addiction and prevention. The campaign, Whatcom Has Hope (Heroin and other Opiate Prevention and Education), sheds light on the opioid crisis and provides strategies for how Whatcom County families can better understand and safeguard themselves from addiction and overdose.

“Opioid addiction doesn’t discriminate,” says Anne Deacon, Human Services Manager with the Whatcom County Health Department. “Despite what people commonly think, it can happen to anyone. That’s why we want people to know what actions they can take in their own homes, with their families and loved ones, to prevent opioid abuse.”

Prescription opioids have played a significant part in the problem of opioid abuse. Nationally, four out of five current heroin users began by first using prescription pain medications. Whatcom Has Hope aims to raise awareness about this issue through its website, videos featuring local perspectives on the impact of opioids, and shareable social media content with practical tips anyone can use to prevent opioid abuse and overdose.

“At UnityCare NW, we educate our patients about the responsible use of narcotic pain meds,” says Des Skubi, Executive Director of UnityCare Northwest, a member of the task force. “This campaign helps spread and reinforce that message – that each and every person in Whatcom County can play a part in preventing opioid abuse by doing simple things like properly disposing of unused medicines or trying alternative pain management techniques.”

The national epidemic of opioid addiction has hit hard in Whatcom County. Demand for opioid treatment has nearly tripled in Whatcom County since the early 2000s, and programs like the Whatcom County Health Department’s syringe exchange, which provides clean syringes to injection drug users, have seen a nearly four-fold increase from 2009-2017.

Whatcom Has Hope (www.whatcomhope.org) was developed as one strategy in the opioid task force’s partnership efforts to curb the opioid epidemic locally. More information about additional strategies in the Whatcom County Opioid Abuse Prevention and Response Plan is available at <http://whatcomhope.org/wp-content/uploads/Whatcom-County-Opioid-Abuse-Prevention-Response-Plan.pdf>.

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