



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heart of Florida United Way Launches New Program to Address Opioid Crisis in Central Florida

Text OPIOID to TXT-211 to connect with information and resources.

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Orlando, Fla (May 2, 2018) – Heart of Florida United Way, in support of the collaborative efforts of the Orange County Heroin Task Force, is launching a first-of-its-kind, cutting-edge program to help address the surge of opioid related deaths and ER visits in the community and save lives.

The Opioid Texting Program is designed to help those experiencing opioid dependency, their families or support network, professional providers or anyone in the community connect to the available resources to battle the opioid epidemic. It is designed to work exclusively through text, with the option of speaking to a live 2-1-1 specialist 24/7, and is simple to use. By texting OPIOID to TXT-211 this communication tool provides information, assistance and support to anyone seeking help to address opioid dependency.

The program allows someone to anonymously reach out through text to get information and resources. It is structured in a way in which the client can choose from four main options, including general information on opioid use, resources for a person concerned about someone using opioids, resources for someone abusing opioids and an option for professionals or service providers. Additional information provided includes signs of opioid use and overdose reversal medication, disposing of prescriptions and resources for treatment and support groups. Clients then receive 130 days of messages to provide affirmation and on-going support.

“Based on the statistics, we can conclude that the opioid epidemic is a matter of life and death,” said Jeff Hayward, President and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. “Addiction is a serious disease and a public health emergency that needs to be addressed. It is not a categorized problem. It is killing our friends, children and children’s parents and destroying families.”

“Orange County continues to be aggressive in confronting the deadly presence of heroin and other opioids in Central Florida. While our law enforcement community is focused on stopping the flow of illegal drugs, the Heroin Task Force and our community partners are working to educate young people, families and the broader community about the devastating consequences of heroin, fentanyl and other illicit opioid use, as well as the many resources that are available,” said Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs. “By raising awareness and focusing on prevention, we’re working to halt this deadly and heartbreaking epidemic. Through innovative treatment and education resources – including specific outreach within vulnerable neighborhoods and communities, and strong outreach campaigns aimed at prevention and awareness. This new opioid texting program was created to save lives by providing resources and support not only to those using opioids, but also for their loved ones, and anyone in the community who is concerned about this epidemic. Through systemic change, we’re working to save lives and put an end to the opioid epidemic.”



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According to the 2017 American Journal of Preventive Medicine, text message interventions are capable of producing positive change in preventive health behaviors. Preliminary evidence indicates that these effects can be maintained after the intervention stops. Heart of Florida United Way's 2-1-1 is taking a leading role in addressing the epidemic because they are experts in community resources and knowledgeable in the use of text messaging communication.

Other facts about opioid use:

- Drug poisoning has now surpassed automobile collisions as the leading cause of accidental death in the US.
- A report put together by the state's Medical Examiners Commission, shows the number of fatalities where opioids were identified as the cause of death or present in bodies jumped to 5,725 last year. That's an increase of 1,483 more people than in 2015.
- Heroin use has increased across the US among men and women, most age groups and income levels. It is a highly addictive opioid drug with a high risk of overdose and death for users.
- The number of deaths caused by the synthetic opioid fentanyl also jumped 97 percent to 1,390 fatalities across Florida, including 70 deaths in Orlando.

About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida's most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region's most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and managed \$28 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income, health and basic needs. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida's information and assistance, crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers more than \$2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 464,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

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