

Carr: Together, We Can Fight Opioid Abuse in Georgia

Opioid abuse is a national emergency.

Based on the report submitted by White House Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, we are dealing with an epidemic that is, every three weeks, killing people in our nation at a rate equivalent to experiencing the number of lives lost on 911.

Not only is this a national epidemic, but it is one that has had a devastating impact on families and communities all across Georgia.

We are all working hard to fight the scourge of opioid abuse.

By all, I mean those standing alongside me today, community groups, families, educational institutions, companies, chambers of commerce and more.

But, unfortunately, it is an uphill battle.

Last year alone, 982 Georgia families lost a loved one from an opioid-related drug overdose—a death toll that has increased tenfold since 1999.

Opioids—which include Xanax, Hydrocodone, Morphine, Fentanyl and Heroin—are highly addictive.

And, because the chemical can take so many forms, the opioid epidemic is one that has amassed a list of victims that recognizes no demographic, economic or geographical boundaries.

In addition to impacting younger demographics, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Americans age 45 to 64 accounted for roughly 44 percent of deaths from overdoses in 2013 and 2014.

And, the proportion of adults 50 and older seeking treatment for opioid addiction has increased dramatically in recent decades.

From June of 2016 to May of 2017, the total number of opioid doses legally prescribed to Georgia patients surpassed 541 million.

That is roughly 54 legal doses for every man, woman and child in Georgia.

And, I want to point out that as we continue to cut down on our problem with prescription drugs and addiction, dependency is going to cause an increase in the demand for illegal, counterfeit substances hitting our streets... as the GBI crime lab and folks down in Macon know all too well.

Reliance on high-priced prescription drugs can quickly lead to addiction to lower cost street drugs.

We need to be prepared to fight this two-front war.

As Attorney General, I have made it a priority to dig deep into this issue by collaborating with fellow attorneys general, colleagues in Georgia's public sector—including our law enforcement officials—and leaders in the private and non-profit sectors.

Most importantly, I've heard from Georgia citizens who have experienced the loss firsthand.

It is through these conversations that I realized we are still too often combatting this issue, not in unison, but rather in silos.

While well-intentioned, we are each looking at this national crisis through a different lens, including prevention, rehabilitation, legislation, law enforcement, workforce, or healthcare to name a few.

We need to do a better job of connecting across all areas of expertise to specify what each other is doing and, together, leverage the strengths we each have to collectively combat this crisis.

The Office of the Attorney General is in a unique position to provide that platform, and that is why we are creating a Statewide Opioid Task Force, providing an infrastructure of communication between the public, private and non-profit sectors, local, state and federal officials and other stakeholders to ensure we have strong and effective tools to combat this issue that is plaguing our state and nation.

We believe this platform will help us strengthen our state's response and save lives, and we are grateful to the many partners across Georgia who will be joining us on October 4, 2017, for our first meeting at Atlanta Technical College.

While focusing on increased communication between participants, we also will be doing our very best to keep Georgians involved in and informed about our conversations. We are urging everyone to stay up-to-date on our meetings and the Statewide Opioid Task Force's progress by visiting law.ga.gov.

This is all in issue.

In Georgia, we have incredible experts in this field, we have accomplished and successful organizations and first class assets, all of which—*together*—can do great things.

Together, we can fight opioid abuse in Georgia.

Together, we can save lives.