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Opinion

Editorial: New Ohio programs show promise in opioid battle

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It shouldn't be a surprise that Ohio is pioneering promising programs to help some of our most vulnerable citizens avoid drug addiction.

Necessity being the mother of invention surely has something to do with it: Ohio's opioid epidemic is among the nation's worst, with overdose-death tolls continuing to climb from 12 a day in 2016 to 14 a day in 2017. Overdose deaths nationally climbed from 175 to 186 per day in that period, meaning Ohio's share rose from 6.9 percent to 7.5 percent.

It is worth noting that both programs emphasize the importance of helping youngsters learn to identify and rely on trusted adults who can help them make and keep healthy decisions and avoid drug abuse. Those who can play that role are encouraged to do so — and maybe help finally turn the tide against the very real opioid monster.

One prevention initiative operating in New Albany is seen as an innovative new national model and another being piloted in Belpre along the Ohio River has attracted national media attention for its creative approach.

The New Albany program — Stop to Live — is offered by Life Town Columbus in the Lori Schottenstein Chabad Center. It was developed in partnership with Columbus City Schools and is offered to special-needs children from across Ohio. Creators and advocates for its expansion believe it is a first-of-its-kind program and one that is desperately needed.

Stop to Live recognizes that children with mental and physical disabilities are at higher risk of experiencing depression and trauma that can lead them to overreliance on prescription drugs and ultimately opioids.



Advocates have praised the program's approach to intervene with an often-forgotten population in the fight against opioid addiction. Those touting its potential include directors of the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services and the Franklin County boards of Developmental Disabilities and Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health.

Stop to Live teaches six lessons through one-on-one activities, working to build self-esteem and empower disabled children to make healthy choices. Researchers from Ohio State University will study the program's effectiveness as plans are made to expand it beyond Ohio.

In the southeastern Ohio community of Belpre, an elementary school is testing the Health and Opioid Prevention Education program, aptly called HOPE. It was developed by a Wright State University health and physical education professor leading a team of educators funded with a grant from the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

HOPE offers 20-minute lessons that classroom teachers can easily incorporate as appropriate for their elementary classes. It has attracted coverage from the Washington Post for its method of targeting early education as a route to prevent opioid and other drug abuse later in life.

As with Stop to Live, HOPE tackles topics of medication awareness and making healthy choices in age- and ability-appropriate ways that children — whether challenged by disabilities or not — can comprehend.

HOPE is especially needed because a 2014 state law required schools to teach students about the dangers of prescription medications leading to opiate abuse and heroin addiction but left it to local districts to figure out how to comply. Understandably, most schools didn't have a ready way to respond, said HOPE's developer, professor Kevin Lorson.

Enough trusted adults can give future generations hope for healthy lives.