

## Opiate symposium tells of Stark's progress

Ohio Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor speaks at the Opiate Symposium in St...



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### Program highlights local efforts in fight against opioid crisis

**PLAIN TWP.** Stark County started several new initiatives to tackle the opioid crisis during the last year.

It expanded medication-assisted treatment for addiction. Cops, nurses and social workers started doing outreach with overdose survivors. The Canton Health Department is running a syringe exchange and CommQuest Services opened a new detox center in Alliance.

Speakers on Wednesday at the annual Opiate Symposium presented by Stark County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery and the Stark County Health Department gave updates on those efforts, and the downward trend in fatal overdoses in the county. First Christian Church hosted the event.

Last year, the Stark County Coroner's Office reported 119 overdose deaths.

Stark MHAR Executive Director John R. Aller said the county could see a third fewer overdose deaths this year.

"In some ways, this is a day to kind of celebrate the good work that's being done," Aller said. "The fact that we have less overdoses is very important, but our goal is to get that number to zero, and anything that we can do as a community to provide these initiatives is going to be important."

Driving home the human toll of the crisis, Cindy Koumoutzis, of Ohio C.A.N., and Julie Oster Priebe of Crisis Intervention & Recovery Center, read the names of individuals who had died from overdoses so far this year.

### **State leaders speak**

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor also spoke at the symposium. DeWine and Taylor are Republican candidates for governor.

DeWine said the state's opioid problem is well documented, but there are communities and individuals doing amazing work to save lives.

"What's going on in Stark County, I think, is a model for the rest of the state," DeWine said.

He also talked about the state's lawsuit against the makers of prescription opioids and elements of his 12-point plan to address the opioid crisis, such as comprehensive prevention education for Ohio students.

Taylor talked about being the mother of two sons who are in recovery and getting past the stigma of addiction.

"Speaking from personal experience, it is so important for families to know that they are not alone when dealing with a loved one who is struggling with an opiate or other addiction," Taylor said.

She also talked about what the state has done to combat the opioid crisis and her plan to address the epidemic if elected governor, including a 10-year, \$1 billion bond issue to fund addiction-treatment services and medical research.

## Recovery story

The audience also heard from individuals who are in recovery.

David Monter II said he lost his career in law enforcement to addiction and ended up in prison, but has been sober since 2009.

Today, he works for Goodwill Industries of Greater Cleveland and East Central Ohio, where he helps clients get jobs. He also is in graduate school and works as an intern with CommQuest Services.

“If, at the end of the day you walk out of here with hope, that’s the most important thing,” Monter said. “As long as somebody’s still alive, there’s still hope that they can get better.”

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