

REALITY CHECK: LOCAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS WORKING TOGETHER TO REVERSE OPIOID TREND

WLOS, Aaron Adelson | July 26, 2017



Medical professionals across the mountains are teaming up to fight addiction. The Western North Carolina Substance Use Alliance began meeting about six months ago and just finalized its strategic plan. (Photo credit: WLOS staff)

ASHEVILLE--(WLOS) — Medical professionals across the mountains are teaming up to fight addiction. The Western North Carolina Substance Use Alliance began meeting about six months ago and just finalized its strategic plan. The alliance focuses on four key areas:

1. Boosting treatment for pregnant women
2. Strengthening long-term care and treatment for adults
3. Strengthening long-term care and treatment for kids and adolescents
4. Expanding medication assisted treatment

The alliance isn't solely focused on opioids, but they are a major focus. It's part of the alliance's aim to change prescribing habits. Mountain Area Health Education Center hosts 36 residents at a time and has a history of many residents staying in the area as primary care physicians. Dr. Daniel Frayne works to train residents and more experienced doctors.

"I think it's much more challenging to change habits than to teach a new prescriber what is the best approach," Frayne said.

A new state law called the STOP Act mandates doctors can only prescribe a five-day supply of opioids for acute pain; a refill requires another appointment. More than ever, doctors are talking to one another.

MAHEC's Elizabeth Flemming meets once a month with local health and human services directors, county leaders, providers and others who participate in the alliance.

"We're trying to break down the silos not only between physicians, but between physicians and behavioral health," Flemming, MAHEC's director of Whole Person Care, said.

Vaya Health started the alliance, hoping to combine different grassroots efforts and scale them for the region. CEO Brian Ingraham said, with the plan drafted, the discussion can move toward figuring out how to make it happen.

"What are we going to prioritize? What can be done? Who can do it? And, of course, how can it be funded? Which is probably going to be our greatest challenge," said Ingraham.

He said the alliance will have short- and long-term goals. Immediately, the alliance may be able to expand availability of Naloxone. In the long-term, he wants to increase education about the dangers of opioids and how doctors think about them.

Buncombe County Health and Human Services Director Jim Holland participates in the alliance. He said it's helpful to make sure people in the region are on the same page.

[View video here.](#)