



Recently, many communities in northwestern Minnesota have seen a significant increase in opioid related overdoses and deaths. Specifically, law enforcement within the communities of Beltrami County, the Red Lake Nation, the White Earth Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and the City of Bemidji have responded to 62 overdoses since December 1st of 2020. Ten (10) of those overdoses have resulted in fatalities. While law enforcement works to find those people responsible for bringing these harmful drugs into our communities we also need help from the public to end these preventable tragedies.

Over the last decade the opioid epidemic has tragically affected individuals, families and communities. Tribal leaders, law enforcement officials, public health and community partners have taken steps to help people overcome their addictions and to save lives. An example is that law enforcement officers from these communities are all trained and equipped with the lifesaving medication naloxone. This has resulted in saving more than 100 lives in our communities. However, the significant increase recently may be attributed to synthetic opioids or fentanyl which naloxone has little effect upon. It is important to know that these drugs can be fatal upon the first use.

If you, or someone you know, is suffering from opioid addiction it is important to know there is treatment available in our communities. You can seek help from health care providers, public health organizations and treatment providers. There are also online resources available for addiction through the Minnesota Department of Health. If you believe a family member may be abusing opioids, common symptoms of opioid abuse include: drowsiness, uncontrollable cravings, frequent flu-like symptoms, change in sleep habit and isolation. You may notice small folds of tin foil, small plastic baggies, random prescribed pills or the disappearance of your own prescription medication. These observations should not be overlooked and you should seek help.

Additionally, we all recognize that addiction is real and powerful. Overdose deaths are preventable. The U.S. Surgeon General has emphasized the importance of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone. For family and friends of people who have opioid use disorder, it is important to know how to use naloxone and keeping it within reach can save a life. Although we do not condone the use of illegal drugs, if you must use, make sure someone is with you. An opioid overdose results in the slowing of the respiratory system and in some instances it can stop your breathing. Without the immediate intervention of someone else the results can be fatal. Minnesota's Good Samaritan Law, statute 604A.05, provides immunity from prosecution for those individuals who call for help when someone else is suffering from an overdose. The goal of this statute, and ours, is to save lives in our communities.

Working together the leaders of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, the White Earth Nation, the Red Lake Nation, Beltrami County and the City of Bemidji seek to save lives and end the cycle of addiction that has tragically impacted our communities.