

Op-Ed: International Overdose Awareness Day: A Call for Collective Action

Each year, August 31 is recognized as International Overdose Awareness Day—a crucial time to remember those lost to overdose, support their families and advocate for better understanding and treatment of this global crisis. As Vice President of Substance Use Disorders at Foundations Recovery Network, I often witness firsthand the profound and devastating impacts addiction and overdose have on individuals, families and communities.

In 2023, more than 107,000 Americans lost their lives to overdose.

Federal research indicates that drug overdoses are now a leading cause of death among Americans between the ages of 18 and 45, including an increased number of overdoses in pregnant women. While there is no “quick fix” for this alarming issue, collective action on behalf of treatment professionals and within our local communities could ideally reduce these numbers in the future.

At Foundations, our goal is to empower individuals to find their unique path to recovery from co-occurring addiction and mental health disorders so they can achieve lasting connection and stability in a recovery-focused life. We emphasize treating both addiction and any co-occurring mental health issues that may exist, such as depression, anxiety and PTSD. An integrated treatment approach is essential to address these interconnected issues and work toward long-term recovery.

The stigma surrounding addiction and mental health continues to remain a significant barrier to care, preventing many from seeking help and leading to feelings of isolation. Breaking down these barriers is vital; we must all strive daily to foster environments where seeking treatment is encouraged and supported rather than stigmatized. At Foundations, we offer acceptance without judgment. Many of our staff members are in recovery themselves and have lived experience with overdose, which provides them with unique insight into the issues that affect those struggling with substance use.

It is also important to remember that addiction does not exist in a vacuum. Local community involvement is essential to help combat overdose deaths in simple ways, including making naloxone, a medication that can reverse opioid overdoses, widely available and educating the public on its use. Additionally, we need governmental, community, and workplace policies that support access to comprehensive addiction treatment, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and mental health services.

On this International Overdose Awareness Day, let us remember that behind each statistic is a person—a loved one lost. At Foundations, we honor the memory of those lost to overdose by advocating for a world where those facing addiction and mental health challenges can receive the support and treatment they need, a world where recovery is possible for everyone.

Sincerely,

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