



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sheridan VA supports global campaign to end drug overdose deaths

SHERIDAN, Wyoming (Aug. 25, 2022) — The Sheridan VA Health Care System joins with national and global efforts to raise awareness of and end drug overdose deaths.

The first step is education. A drug overdose is a result of ingesting a drug or a combination of drugs in greater quantities than recommended and can lead to serious medical problems, including death. VA pharmacist Megan Ziegler, Sheridan’s coordinator for the system’s Pain Management, Opioid Safety, and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, said unfortunately there continues to be denial of how serious the issue is.

“It doesn’t happen in our communities’ is a belief by many people, especially in small communities,” said Ziegler. “However, the reality is that it does impact all communities, even here at home in our Wyoming communities.”

In fact, drug overdose deaths in Wyoming increased by 11 percent from February 2021 to February 2022. In the last year, Wyoming had 110 deaths related to drug overdoses, with 68 of those deaths related to opioid medications like morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone and fentanyl.

But it is not just a Wyoming or national issue—it’s a global issue. That is why the global community has designated August 31 every year as International Overdose Awareness Day. It provides a dedicated day for people and communities to come together to raise awareness of one of the world’s most urgent public health crises – one that, unfortunately, is only getting worse.

“Early statistics and anecdotal evidence for the 2022 calendar year show that the situation is becoming ever-more critical,” said Ziegler. “It was exacerbated in many areas by the pandemic decreasing the tolerance of people who use drugs and disrupting both services and the drug supply chain.”

That’s why the day, and a community focus on it, is critical. The goal of International Overdose Awareness Day is to create a better understanding of overdose, reduce the stigma of drug-related deaths, and create change that reduces the harms associated with drug use.

Ziegler and the Sheridan VA pharmacy team want to make sure community members know how they can make a difference and shift the tide of drug overdoses. The following are their recommendations:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of drug overdoses. This includes blue lips/nails, shallow or no breathing, pinpoint pupils, and unable to be awakened. Different medications can cause different symptoms and it is important to call 911 if an overdose is suspected.
- Stop the shaming. Destigmatizing drug-related deaths and raising awareness on the increasing rates of overdose will help those who need help come forward.

- Dispose of unused or expired medications – contact your local pharmacy or police department for year-round medication disposal locations.
- Remember that Naloxone saves lives. This is a medication that can reverse overdoses related to opioids. Naloxone kits are readily accessible through community pharmacies in Wyoming.
- Share encouragement to those you know. Recovery is possible—multiple medications exist to help patients who struggle with substance use disorders. They include Suboxone, naltrexone, and acamprosate.

For more information on this topic, including education and resources available in Wyoming communities, check out the Wyoming Department of Health website at <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/prevention/substanceabuseandsuicide/opioid-information-wyoming/>

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The Sheridan VA Health Care System serves Veterans across three quarters of Wyoming and the Rocky Mountain Region. Besides a medical center in Sheridan, the system has eight Outpatient Clinics located in Casper, Riverton, Cody, Gillette, Rock Springs, Worland, Evanston, and Afton, Wyoming. Follow us at www.facebook.com/SheridanVAMC and www.twitter.com/SheridanVAMC and now on www.instagram.com/SheridanVAMC.