SAFE group works to stop spread of opioids

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While Northern Michigan is home to various inland lakes, ski resorts, golf courses and other getaways, it’s also home to what unfortunately is also going on across the state and country.

The opioid epidemic is still ongoing in Northern Michigan.

However, over the past 18 months, the SAFE in Northern Michigan Coalition has worked with many Northern Michigan community partners to help prevent opioid abuse in the area.

“We know that it takes a whole community effort to overcome youth opioid abuse and we’re grateful for our community partners,” said Nichole Flickema, community health coordinator for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan.

“As we know nationally and statewide, this is also an emerging trend in our community.”

According to Northern Michigan Substance Abuse Service/Northern Michigan Regional Entity, treatment admissions related to prescription opiates or heroin increased from near 22 percent in 2009 to 34 percent in 2016. Also, the Northern Michigan Regional Entity regional opiate or heroin death rate per 100,000 people increased from 3.6 in 2013 to 5.5 in 2014.

After recognizing youth opioid and prescription drug abuse as an emerging trend in the area, the SAFE Coalition partnered with organizations like Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Drop Off (POD) workgroup, local schools, pharmacies, law enforcement, parents, physicians and other youths to provide an environment in which youth become more knowledgeable about the risks of prescription drug abuse and have less access to prescription drugs and opioids.

Date from the 2016 Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth shows 7.6 percent of 11th-grade students in Antrim, Charlevoix and Emmet counties reported taking a prescription drug not prescribed to them during the past 30 days, while one in six students perceived the use of prescription drugs not prescribed to them as not having a moderate of great risk.

“We know many teens are accessing these medications in a medicine cabinet,” Flickema said, highlighting the need for enhanced education not only for young people, but also adults, who might not realize their legitimate medications could be getting in the wrong hands.

Over the course of nearly a year and a half, grant funding allowed SAFE in Northern Michigan—a multifaceted program which prevents youth substance use, increase community awareness and create change through collaboration, education, prevention initiative and environmental strategies of tobacco, alcohol and other substance use in Antrim, Charlevoix and Emmet counties—to partner with the Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Drop-Off workgroup, to build on prevention efforts in the region based on seven strategies for community change framework recommended by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America.

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