



County Of Dane
Office Of The County Executive

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May 5, 2021
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County Executive Convenes “Ending Deaths from Despair Coalition” to Help Prevent Deaths from Suicide, Drug Overdose and Alcoholism

Task Force Will Implement Action Plan Redoubling Concrete Solutions as COVID Pandemic Resulted in 40% Increase in Drug and Alcohol-Related EMS Calls and Rising Preventable Deaths

Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi joined local community leaders in the first meeting of the “Ending Deaths from Despair Coalition” with a mission to help prevent deaths from suicides, drug overdoses and chronic alcoholism. The County Executive convened this first-of-its-kind collaboration, bringing together over 20 partners from Dane County—including clinical mental health providers, police, fire and EMS first responders, area businesses, crisis service providers, judiciary, and community advocates—to develop a shared plan to help prevent the irreparable pain caused by suicide and premature, preventable deaths.

“In spite of our strong local economy, active social networks and excellent health care, Dane County has not been spared losses caused by the opioid overdose epidemic and suicide,” said County Executive Parisi. “Then came the COVID pandemic, and we have seen a 40% increase in drug and alcohol-related EMS calls. We can’t stand by and watch this trend continue as communities of color have been especially hard hit and bear a disproportionate burden. The task force will intensify our efforts to end preventable deaths by expanding our successful programs and implementing new strategies to save lives.”

“Thanks to Dane County’s leadership on initiatives like ED2Recovery, Behavioral Health Resource Center, and the CJ Tubbs Fund supporting long-term residential treatment, programs are underway to address deaths from despair in our community,” said Cheryl Wittke, Executive Director of Safe Communities. “This new coalition signals the added commitment of many partners to end these tragic, preventable deaths.”

1,022 people have lost their lives in Dane County by suicide or drug overdose since 2016, according to figures from the Dane County Medical Examiner’s Office. The figures are from 2016 up through the first couple of months of this year, with most of the overdoses (over 86%) occurring because of opiates.

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