



# BOROUGH OF FRANKLIN LAKES THE MUNICIPAL ALLIANCE REPORT ON OPIOID ABUSE

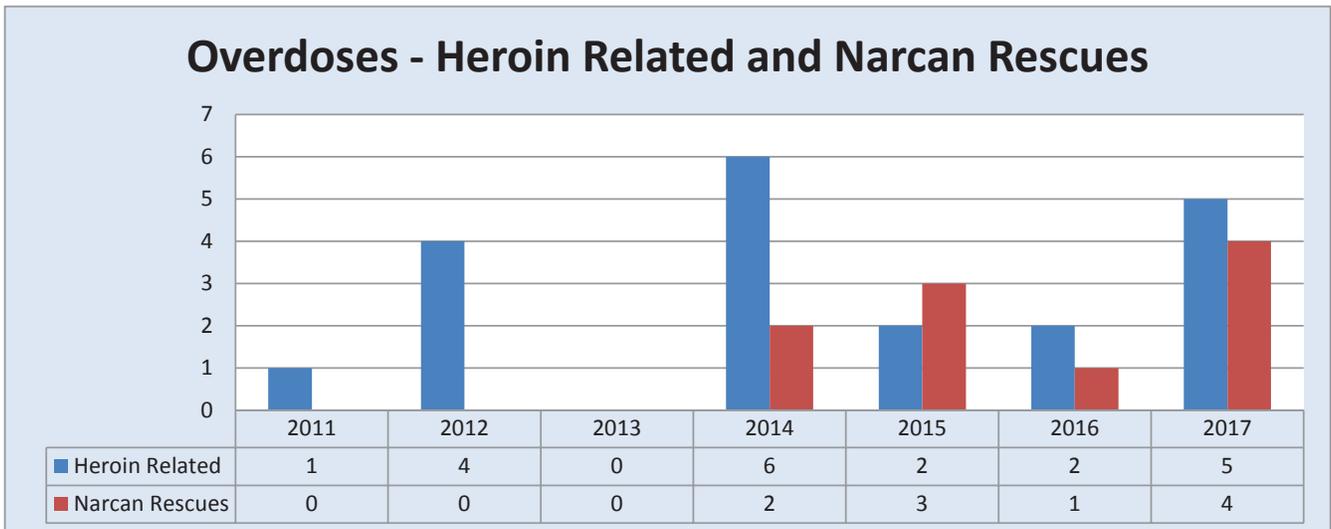
## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE FRANKLIN LAKES COMMUNITY

February 2018

Dear Franklin Lakes Resident,

My name is Henry Wasserstein. I have resided with my wife in Franklin Lakes for over 36 years. In June 2012, I became Chairman of the Franklin Lakes Municipal Alliance. The mission of the Municipal Alliance is to promote the health and well-being of individuals in Franklin Lakes through the reduction or elimination of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. We meet quarterly at the Ambulance Corps Building. Our next meeting is scheduled for March 14 at 9:30 AM, with a snow emergency date of March 21. Our constituents include our Mayor and members of Council, representatives of our schools (faculty, parents and students), Police Department, Board of Health members and other concerned citizens. At the first meeting over which I presided, there were 17 attendees. Happily, as a result of increased involvement of concerned community members, attendance has gradually grown. In fact, at our recent meeting on January 10, 2018, our attendance was more than twice that of my first meeting.

You would have to be living under a rock if you were unaware that our nation is in the midst of an opioid crisis. The purpose of this letter is to discuss this crisis and the steps we in Franklin Lakes are taking to respond to it. Between 1999 and 2016, more than 600,000 people nationwide died as a result of drug overdoses. That number continues to increase every year. In 2016 alone, 63,632 people died of overdoses. The number of annual overdose deaths for 2016 exceeded the number of deaths due to AIDS at the peak of that epidemic. Furthermore, drug overdoses now kill more people than gun homicides and car crashes combined. As a result of this epidemic, for the first time in nearly 55 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American life expectancy at birth declined for two consecutive years.



We in Franklin Lakes have not been immune. Since 2012, our Police have responded to multiple drug overdoses in every year and, except for 2013, fatalities due to drug overdoses have occurred in our Borough in each year. While some communities have more overdose reports and fatalities than others, virtually every community in Bergen County has been affected by the opioid epidemic. In order to understand the steps that are being taken to deal with the current epidemic, we must discuss its derivation.

# THE MUNICIPAL ALLIANCE

The current opioid epidemic dates back to the late 1990s when a few pharmaceutical companies began to aggressively promote and market to health care professionals opioids for chronic non-cancer-related pain, overstating the benefits of the pain relief capabilities of the opioids and significantly understating the likelihood of addiction. Health care professionals were pursued so aggressively and successfully that opioid prescriptions increased tenfold from 1997 to 2002. It was not until recently that the health care community began to understand that the risk of opioid dependency increases dramatically for each day that someone is prescribed opioids. In addition, while opioids may be effective for short-term pain relief, recent research appears to demonstrate that continued opioid use may not reduce chronic pain. Moreover, when opioids are no longer available, many users move on to heroin because heroin is so readily available and far less expensive than opioid pills.

I believe that the tide is turning: as a result of information being published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other governmental bodies, health care professionals are beginning to learn of the limited pain-relief capabilities of opioids and the addictive nature of these medications. Health care professionals are examining alternatives to opioid medications for surgeries and, at the very least, are limiting the number of pills prescribed for pain relief. A number of states have imposed limitations on the number of opioids that may be initially prescribed and have required an additional visit to the doctor before additional opioids may be prescribed. In New Jersey, on February 15, 2017, then Governor Christie signed legislation limiting initial opioid prescriptions to a 5-day supply (except for cancer patients and those in end-of-life hospice care). In addition, Governor Christie was responsible for launching a massive public relations campaign urging persons with drug addictions to seek help. We hope that Governor Murphy will continue with this campaign. As a result of these initiatives, opioids are being prescribed less frequently and in lesser amounts. While it will take a long time for these results to translate into fewer overdose deaths, at least anecdotally, it appears that we are moving in the right direction.

In our community, the Municipal Alliance has been partnering with the Borough, our schools, parent groups, Police Department and other Municipal Alliances to publicize the epidemic—advising residents to avoid taking opioids if at all possible and to get help if an opioid addiction develops. These are some of the events and other activities in which we have recently participated:

- The Franklin Lakes Board of Health partnered with our Municipal Alliance to conduct a seminar for professionals about the dangers of, and the alternatives to, opioids.
- Our Municipal Alliance was one of the sponsors of a program for students and their parents at both Ramapo and Indian Hills High Schools to hear Chris Herren, a former professional basketball player and drug addict, speak about his addiction and recovery and his emphasis on healthy life choices.
- We have arranged for Stephanie Reifman, a Northern Highlands Regional High School student, to put on a program about heroin addiction (twice in the last three years) for 7th and 8th graders at the Franklin Avenue Middle School ("FAMS"). Stephanie's programs - where she interviews recovering addicts and parents who have lost children to drug addiction - are truly amazing. A key indicator of the effectiveness of her message is the almost endless number of questions she and her interviewees receive from the student body.
- We have put on a program for members of Activities Unlimited, a non-profit organization of retired and semi-retired men, about the dangers of opioids to them, their children and grandchildren.

# REPORT ON OPIOID ABUSE

- We had been working on a "playbook" for coaches in the schools to educate their players and their players' parents about the dangers of opioid use in treating sports injuries. Just as we were nearing completion of that exercise, the New Jersey Department of Education promulgated its "Opioid Use and Misuse Educational Fact Sheet" that accomplishes that same purpose. We are now working on adapting that Fact Sheet for use in our Middle Schools and for our Recreation and Parks Department Sports programs.
- Most importantly, we have enlisted the services of Franklin Lakes resident, Patty Trava, as the Community Liaison to the Municipal Alliance. Patty, whose daughter, Caitlin, died of a heroin overdose, provides confidential guidance and support to anyone who is seeking help about their own addiction problem or the addiction of a family member. She can be reached 24/7 by phone (201-466-1408) or by email ([MuniAlliance@franklinlakes.org](mailto:MuniAlliance@franklinlakes.org)). Recently, Patty spoke at Ramapo High School, along with then New Jersey Attorney General Christopher Porrino and Bergen County Prosecutor Gurbir Grewal (the newly-named New Jersey Attorney General) about the opioid epidemic in New Jersey and the steps being taken to deal with it.
- Finally, we assisted the Franklin Lakes Police Department in formulating a written Drug Amnesty Policy. That Policy provides, in essence, that individuals who advise the Police Department that they are addicted to opioids and need help will not be prosecuted, but will, instead, be referred to appropriate drug counseling and addiction recovery services. Similarly, if the person requesting assistance is a family member or guardian, the addict will be treated in the same manner as if he or she had sought assistance.

Going forward, as part of FAMS Living Lessons May biannual event, the Franklin Lakes Municipal Alliance is sponsoring a presentation by Maureen Morello entitled "Jesse's Journey." Maureen, who has lectured extensively in Bergen and Passaic Counties to students and their parents, will speak about the grievous injuries sustained by her son, Jesse, as a result of his use of heroin.

It will take a long time to end this scourge. What I believe to be the biggest impediment to our efforts is the attitude of many of the parents in our community who still believe in the mantra "Not My Kid." Opioid addiction does not discriminate: it affects the wealthy and the poor; the educated and the uneducated; the youth, the senior citizen and everyone in between. It does not discriminate based upon race, religion or creed. While the increased participation of community members in the Municipal Alliance is encouraging, the limited number of parents and other community members who attend our educational events is disheartening. If we are to achieve ultimate success, we must have parents do their part by attending programs where there are discussions of drug and alcohol addiction issues and by helping us do more.

As I stated at the outset, our next meeting is March 14 at 9:30 AM. Our meetings never go beyond 11:00 AM. If you would like to get involved, please contact me at [henry.wasserstein@skadden.com](mailto:henry.wasserstein@skadden.com) or our Municipal Alliance Coordinator, Liz Morris, at [lmorris@franklinlakes.org](mailto:lmorris@franklinlakes.org). We would love to have you join our team!

Sincerely,



Henry Wasserstein

**2018 Municipal Alliance Meetings**  
Franklin Lakes Ambulance Corps Building  
**Wednesday, March 14 at 9:30 AM**  
**Wednesday, May 9 at 9:30 AM**

## COMMUNITY LIAISON

**PATTY TRAVA**  
**201-466-1408**

**MUNIALLIANCE@FRANKLINLAKES.ORG**

Patty Trava, the Community Liaison to the Franklin Lakes Municipal Alliance, will assist those in crisis or those who need guidance on substance abuse issues by referring them to appropriate services to address their needs. All communications with Patty will be strictly confidential.

If you need help and don't know where to turn, please reach out, day or night, to Patty Trava, by phone or email.

## AMNESTY POLICY

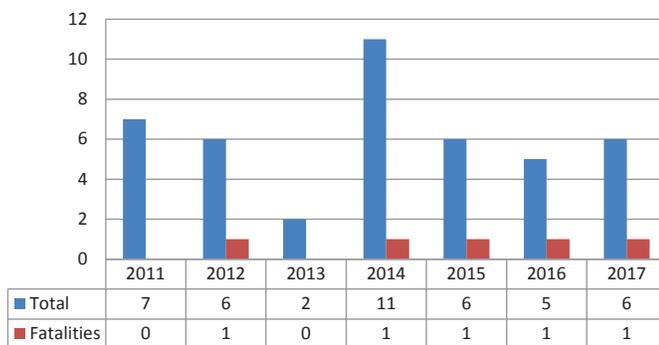
Recognizing that getting help for those in the downward spiral of drug addiction is far more important than penalizing them, the Franklin Lakes Police Department has implemented the following policy:

“Individuals who advise the Franklin Lakes Police Department that they are addicted to opioids and need help will not be charged with a crime or prosecuted, but will, instead, be referred to appropriate drug counseling and addiction recovery services. If such opioid-dependent individuals are referred to us by parents, children, spouses, guardians or siblings, they will be treated in the same manner as if those individuals had themselves provided the advice to us.”

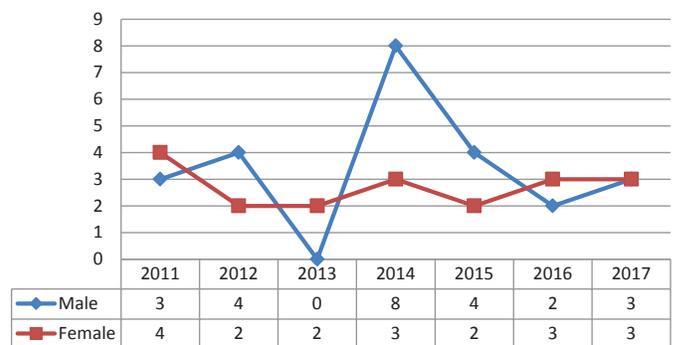
**Police Department**  
**201-891-3131**

## FRANKLIN LAKES DRUG OVERDOSE INCIDENTS 2011 TO 2017

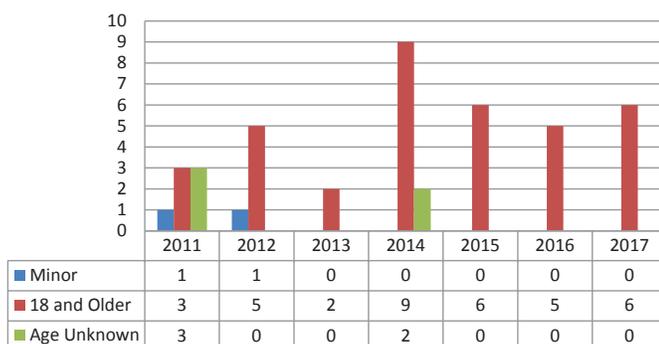
**Overdose Total and Fatalities**



**Overdose - Male vs. Female**



**Overdose Age**



**Drug arrests**

