August 27, 2020

Special day to create better understanding of overdose

MOBILE, Alabama — Communities in Mobile County and around the world are coming together on Monday to remember those who have died or suffered permanent injury because of drug overdose.

Observed on the 31st of August each year, International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) seeks to create better understanding of overdose, reduce the stigma of drug-related deaths, and create change that reduces the harms associated with drug use. By observing the date this year, the people of Mobile County are joining themselves to a global movement for understanding, compassion, and change.

People and communities came together to raise awareness of one of the world’s most urgent public health crises – one that, unfortunately, is only getting worse. According to the most recent World Annual Drug Report from the United Nations’ Office on Drugs and Crime, 585,000 people around the world died as a result of drug use in 2017.

In 2019, there were 874 IOAD events of all kinds, hosted in 39 countries. A full list of the IOAD 2020 events currently planned around the world can be found at https://www.overdoseday.com/activities-2020/

“We are observing this day to honor our loved ones who have died or been injured because of an overdose,” said Veronica Mercadel, the Overdose Program Manager at the Mobile County Health Department. “By coming together to remember them, we stand together to say that more needs to be done to end overdose in our community.”

According to the website https://www.addictioncenter.com/rehabs/alabama/mobile/, opioid abuse is a serious problem in Mobile and throughout Alabama. Doctors in Alabama prescribe more opioids per person than in any other state. Mobile is part of Alabama’s First Congressional District, which has the fifth-highest rate of painkiller prescriptions in the state.

Prescription painkillers like Oxycodone, morphine, and hydrocodone may be legally prescribed throughout the nation, yet they can be highly addictive. Consequently, the number of Mobile residents who are addicted to opioids has risen drastically over the course of the past decade.

The Attorney General of Alabama estimates that 30,000 people in Alabama have an opioid or heroin dependence. In 2016, 343 people in Alabama lost their lives to an opioid overdose. The Mobile police have encountered supplies of heroin which are laced with fentanyl, a synthetic opioid which has killed several hundred people in Alabama in recent years.

“We encourage members of the community to stand in solidarity with the men and women who have been personally affected by overdose by wearing purple on August 31,” said Ms. Mercadel. IOAD is organized by the Penington Institute, an Australian not-for-profit organization.

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