To believe this, is to believe that we can and will defeat the opiate epidemic in Ohio. While this may be a different, even strange way to begin a publication on Ohio's opiate epidemic, it is the only mindset that is going to allow us to defeat this scourge, and make sure that we are putting the individuals and the families that are being impacted by this epidemic first!

By now almost everyone knows or has heard of the impact that the opiate epidemic is having in Ohio. Opioids - prescription drugs, heroin, fentanyl and carfentanil - continued to be the number one driver of drug overdose deaths, and overdose deaths continued to be the leading cause of injury-related deaths in Ohio in 2015. In 2015, overdose deaths were 29.9 per 100,000 in Ohio. While much has been done to combat Ohio's opiate epidemic, as the drugs being utilized morph to more deadly forms, from prescriptions to heroin to fentanyl, we have seen the numbers of overdose deaths continue to rise. In fact, in Ohio we saw the number of fentanyl-related overdose deaths more than double from 503 in 2014 to 1155 in 2015.

What we need to remember is that while there are way too many deaths as a result of Ohio's opiate epidemic, there are also thousands of survivors. Thousands of individuals have been saved by tireless first responders, and/or family members or friends through the utilization of naloxone (narcan). Additionally, thousands of individuals have or are receiving treatment and are embarking on the process of recovery from drug addiction. We know that Treatment Works, and People Recover! An overdose does not have to be a death sentence. Lives can and are being saved. Treatment for opiate addiction is hard work, but more and more individuals are beginning to understand that they can and do recover. Treatment and recovery are never easy, and the process is a lifelong undertaking. But once an individuals is able to access and engage in primary treatment then be connected with recovery supports, they can achieve and sustain long-term recovery and become productive contributing members of their community. Through treatment, families are put back together, parents regain custody of their children, individuals become work-ready and employed, and individuals along with their families become healthier and more productive.
To make sure that all Ohioans have access to the services necessary when they want and need them, Ohio must make sure that we have a robust, healthy continuum of care available across Ohio. This continuum will assist individuals, families, and communities with the ability to address Ohio’s opiate epidemic. Local communities across Ohio have and continue to build partnerships and coalitions to address this terrible epidemic. Locally, Ohio’s Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Boards are working as the local “hub” to bring partners together to address the epidemic, and craft locally designed solutions, but there is more to be done. Ohio’s network of services must be expanded and additional resources made available to ensure that as we convince individuals that treatment can and does work, that they have access to the services they now want and need.

“Treatment Works. People Recover. And Recovery Is Beautiful.” This sounds like a tagline because it is, but it’s also the truth. As we continue to address this opiate epidemic in Ohio, we all need to come together to share hope every chance we get. It’s going to take all of us working together in every community throughout the state to end this epidemic. And we need to make sure we’re taking on this issue on every front. We need to focus on prevention, intervention, interdiction, treatment, and recovery. Every sector of society is impacted by this epidemic and it’s going to take every part of every community to develop a solution to this problem.

The following statement was included in an article published by The Atlantic addressing the opiate epidemic facing our nation today. This statement outlines our struggle and provides us all with hope that, collectively, we can end this epidemic in our communities, in our state, and in our nation.

“It must be total war in every city, town, and village throughout the land,” President Harry Truman exhorted. “For only with a united front can we ever hope to win any war.” With this call to arms, in a 1946 speech just months after the end of World War II, Truman propelled the United States toward war with a new enemy. An ancient scourge had erased millions of lives, permanently ruined several others, and had even forever scarred a president. That enemy was polio, and over a few decades the country would go on to eradicate it entirely.

To beat this opiate epidemic, we must have the same level of commitment and be all-in. It is time for all of us to work together with a common set of goals for how we are going to beat this epidemic. We must have the tenacity and perseverance to stick together as one to pursue these goals. Through it all, we must continue believing in our own abilities to put an end to the deaths and this epidemic in Ohio by working together toward the outcome of having healthier individuals, families, and communities, thus providing HOPE to people that they and their families can survive and become stronger. Together, we can and we will beat this epidemic, making Ohio stronger and better than ever!

“My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we’ll change the world.”

~ Jack Layton

Sources:
Ohio Department of Health
Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

June 2017