



## OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Every day, too many people are destroyed by opioid addiction. It not only impacts the addict but also their families and society. This crisis is felt throughout Lowell and across Massachusetts and the nation. Almost everyone can tell you of a family member, a friend, or a neighbor who has dealt with this challenge. It is a complex crisis affecting our community on multiple levels.

This is a nationwide problem, so what can we do in Lowell to prevent addiction and assist those who suffer from addiction? I believe we can have a tangible impact locally by bringing together policymakers, legislators, public health providers, educators, law enforcement, and those aiding recovery and rehabilitation to work toward real solutions for battling this crisis. Success will take all of us collaborating to solve this puzzle and better our community. This work was begun in earnest in Lowell in 2015 and the joint efforts on the part of the City, the State and many community groups have had a measurable positive effect. Lowell's partnerships responding to the crisis include an Opioid Epidemic Crisis Task Force, Community Opioid Outreach Program, and Child Assessment and Response Evaluation. But there is always more to be done, and we must remain vigilant.

Treatment is critical, so we must find ways to clear treatment waiting lists and create a pathway to help those who are taking the first step to recovery. Early and often education programs help to inform people of the risks associated with opioid addiction. Youth education is especially critical to help our most vulnerable members of society understand the risks and consequences of opioid abuse. But education only goes so far—a longer-term solution to addiction prevention will only occur when all levels of government increase their involvement and bring resources to bear on all aspects of the problem.

When I am on the city council, I will endeavor to bring new ideas to the table. Law enforcement is critical, and I will help ensure our police and public safety officials have all the tools necessary to conduct surveillance and track the source of drug suppliers to aid state and federal law enforcement—we need to help the Lowell Police Department continue to be key players in shutting down suppliers as they were in May 2017 with a massive fentanyl bust. I also want to enhance pathways to housing and employment for individuals who have gone through treatment and are on the road to recovery by working with the Greater Lowell Workforce Development Board. Too often an individual in recovery has difficulty finding meaningful employment or suitable housing and finds themselves staying in an environment that encourages them to begin use of opioid again.

Ending this epidemic will ultimately require a cohesive community effort and an alliance of partners. This will not be easy. But if we share what is happening in each other's lives and are honest and empathetic about the causes of drug addiction, we have a chance to make a difference. The time to help those who are suffering and better our community is now.