

Post Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE WEST SIDE HEROIN TASK FORCE SHINED SPOTLIGHT ON CHICAGO'S WEST SIDE HEROIN CRISIS AT PRESS CONFERENCE

CHICAGO, IL – August 31, 2016 – Today in honor of International Overdose Awareness Day, the West Side Heroin Task Force (WSHTF), spearheaded by Representative La Shawn K. Ford, (8th), Loretto Hospital, and the Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy at Roosevelt University, held its first press conference at the James R. Thompson Center to announce its inauguration as well as to release supporting research conducted by Roosevelt University titled, *“Hidden in Plain Sight: Heroin’s Impact on Chicago’s West Side*, which examines heroin’s impact on Chicago’s West Side.

“The release of Kathleen Kane-Willis' (Roosevelt University) report sends a strong message that Public Act 99-0480, Illinois' Heroin Crisis Act must take priority during budget talks to help save lives in Illinois,” said Rep. La Shawn K. Ford.

Roosevelt’s study found that the West Side has not been spared by the health, legal or fatal ramifications of the heroin crisis. According to the report, nearly 1 in 4 hospitalizations for heroin occurred on the West Side, which make up 35 percent of the total heroin or opioid hospitalizations in Chicago. The report also unveils unprecedented arrest rates for heroin possession, with the highest arrests in East and West Garfield Park on the West Side. With regard to heroin overdose-related deaths, the mortality rate in Chicago is much higher than any other part of the region in Illinois. Moreover, African-Americans die at higher rates from heroin overdose than whites across the state.

“People seem to understand that heroin use is a public health problem and it needs to be treated like one, not just in the suburbs but on the West Side too. We need more treatment – not arrests -to get ahead of this crisis,” said Kathleen Kane-Willis.

In addition to the unveiling of Roosevelt's study, the press conference offered attendees an overview of the overall heroin and opioid problem on the West Side from a medical, economic, and educational perspective.

Speakers included: Loretto Hospital's CEO, Dr. Sonia Mehta; Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (8th); Kathie Kane-Willis, director of the Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy at Roosevelt University; Jamelia Hand, overdose prevention advocate; Dr. Dan Lustig, vice president of clinical services, Haymarket Center; Jacqui Colyer, regional administrator, Illinois Department of Children & Family Services; Chelsea Laliberte, executive director, Live4Lali, Inc.; George Williams, vice president, community and government affairs at Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC); Marianne Schiavone, chairperson, West Suburban Hospital; Doris Davenport, president, Center of Community Connections; and, Camille Y. Lilly, vice president of external affairs and development, Loretto Hospital.

Chelsea Laliberte, the executive director of Live4Lali, who also lost her brother to a heroin overdose in 2009, provided a demonstration on how to administer naloxone, the drug used to reverse overdose.

"I think that it's clear that we accomplished something today – community and unified messaging. Now comes the real work where we roll up our sleeves and start reaching out to more partners to ensure that we can make a difference in the lives of all residents on the west side," said Kane-Willis.

WSHTF, a partnership between Rep. Ford, Loretto Hospital, Roosevelt University, health care organizations, drug policy experts, drug crisis advocates, physicians, including former users, was formed to determine the best strategies to reduce the health and criminal justice consequences of heroin use on Chicago's West Side. The task force's mission is to ensure that evidence-based care and health-centered services are delivered throughout West Side communities.

"The West Side of Chicago needs our help! They need sustainable treatment solutions as well as meaningful prevention programs. With Loretto Hospital and the coordination of care between the members of the new task force, we will be able to provide individuals struggling with heroin with what they need to recover from this addiction," said Dr. Sonia Mehta, CEO and chief medical officer of Loretto Hospital.

Some of the organizations invited to participate in WSHTF include: Office of Congressman Danny K. Davis; Illinois Department of Public Health; Cook County Sheriff's Office; Chicago Recovery Alliance; PCC Community Wellness; Community Outreach Intervention Projects, School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago; St. Anthony Hospital; Biodelivery Sciences; Cook County Justice Advisory Council; Chicago Department of Children & Family Services; Health & Medicine Policy Research Group; Habilitative Systems, Inc.; Peer Services; The Kennedy Forum; Cook County; Community Behavioral Healthcare Association of Illinois; Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association (IADDA); Chicago Department

of Public Health; Stroger Hospital; Family Guidance Centers, Inc.; Cap Quality Care; Soft Landing Recovery; Heartland Health; Healthcare Alternative System; Rincon Family Services; City of Chicago; St. Martin de Porres Church; Fathers Who Care; and, Haymarket Center.

“I’m grateful for today – International Overdose Awareness Day – that we remember the West Side’s heroin crisis, which is literally hidden in plain sight; that we have come together to fight, to direct resources, services and cutting edge programs for the West Side of Chicago with the establishment of the task force,” Ford said.

A copy of Roosevelt University’s study, “*Hidden in Plain Sight: Heroin’s Impact on Chicago’s West Side*,” is available on Roosevelt University’s website at www.roosevelt.edu.

A replay of the press conference is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcGLCquq1xM>

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About Loretto Hospital

Loretto Hospital is a not-for-profit, community-based, and acute care hospital located on Chicago's Far West Side of Chicago. Founded in 1939 by a group of community doctors to create a patient centered hospital that would serve the community regardless of a patient's ability to pay, Loretto has provided comprehensive medical care and social support services to the Austin Community for 75 years. Although the largest percentage of the hospital's patients resides in Austin, neighboring communities and suburbs also utilize Loretto as a healthcare resource. For more information, please visit lorettohospital.org.