

Thank you Senator Yaw and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania for the invitation to speak today.

My name is Kate Lowery. I am a lifelong resident of Beaver County, Pennsylvania – having proudly graduated from Aliquippa High School in 1981. I am the wife of a public high school teacher in one of our local districts, a mother of five children ranging in age from 25 – 14 and I am very grateful to serve as your Single County Authority Administrator for the Beaver County Behavioral Health Drug and Alcohol Program.

I would like to use this time today to explain the role and function of our SCA and apprise community members of our efforts to address and combat the Public Health Crisis of Heroin and Opioid Addiction and Overdose locally.

A Single County Authority functions as the recipient of State and Federal funding, charged with the responsibility of program planning for drug and alcohol prevention, intervention and treatment services for all County residents. We are governed by the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs under the leadership of Secretary Gary Tennis.

It is the position of the Department that no central authority can determine precisely what services are necessary in each of the 67 counties of the commonwealth. Therefore, 47 Single County Authorities (SCAs) have been established so that local input can be provided to the Department in a logical and coordinated manner. Advisory councils at the state and local level have been established so that input can be provided by consumers of drug and alcohol services, family members and treatment providers on policy, procedure, evidence based practices, research, regulation and training matters.

In Beaver County, our SCA sits within the umbrella of Beaver County Behavioral Health, and reports directly to our Mental Health/Intellectual Disabilities Administrator and the Beaver County Board of Commissioners.

Over the past 10 years, prescription drug abuse has increased exponentially in Western Pennsylvania.

The Facts Hurt report, released by the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RAJ) breaks down all injury-related deaths - including automobile incidents, drug overdoses, drowning, falls, and fires - by state. According to the 2013 report, drug overdoses were the leading cause of injury deaths in the United States, at nearly 44,000 per year. These deaths have more than doubled in the past 14 years, and half of them are related to prescription drugs (22,000 per year). Overdose deaths now exceed motor vehicle-related deaths in 36 states.

Pennsylvania fell in the middle for all injury-related deaths, coming in at number. 23, but its drug overdose deaths were significantly above average, at number 9 or 18.9 per 100,000 people.

Beaver County accidental overdose death rates for 2013, unfortunately, outranked statewide statistics, at 39, or approximately 24 lives lost per 100,000 people.

As the SCA Administrator it is my public duty to give our community information on the trends we are seeing in our community relative to this epidemic:

In State Fiscal Year 2013-14 our office provided case management coordination and authorized payments for

- About 1500 episodes of care per year – these are duplicated numbers
- Of almost 800 admission to residential treatment in 2013-14
- 42.4% reported heroin as the primary drug of abuse
- 28.9% reported alcohol as primary - and
- 16.2% reported marijuana as primary
- Most admissions are were in the 25-34 (28%) age range followed by 35 – 44 (13%)

Since 2010 Beaver County has lost 185 lives to accidental overdose, most have involved heroin or other opioids. This statistic does not include any reported accidental overdose deaths for the current year. Our local EMS reports at least one overdose reversal per day with Naloxone. This does not encompass reversal occurring at our hospital, or through municipal departments and Quick Response Teams.

As a concerned citizen who like most of us wears several hats; it pains me to see the toll the scourge of addiction has taken on our community. In each domain of my life, I encounter almost daily people who are fighting the battle of addiction either on a personal level, or as a grieving friend or family member feeling hopeless and helpless to impact this public health crisis.

I would like to thank our local legislators who have worked hard to bring this issue to light in an effort to eliminate the stigma and shame associated with Substance Use Disorders.

The beauty of working and serving in a community such as Beaver County is our people have endured many changes and challenges in industry, health care, economics, demographics and numerous other sectors throughout the years. We are gritty and determined and proud of our diverse backgrounds and heritage. And we are good at leveraging our partnerships in this close community in an effort to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

In light of the frightening drug abuse and overdose trends and statistics evidenced throughout our community; I am grateful for recent collaborative efforts demonstrated by many leaders throughout Beaver County in an effort to identify people afflicted with addiction and move them toward recovery and happier life outcomes. Often we hear that Local Government is lazy and complacent. Or that School Administrators do not care to shine light on the behavioral health or conduct issues within their schools for fear of negative publicity. Or that Law Enforcement Officers and First Responders are indifferent or inhumane in the handling of persons exhibiting Substance Use or Mental Health Disorders. I am here to dispel that myth for our community.

I and some of my Beaver County Behavioral Health colleagues have met with officials in each local school district in recent years in a continued partnership to provide supports and services for students with behavioral health needs. Not one district in our county has closed the door on us or indicated our services are not needed or wanted. We also work closely with our County Emergency Operations Center and First Responders to build capacity for staff who encounter persons exhibiting behavioral health symptoms in times of crises.

Our SCA convened a Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force in 2012. The first meeting was held in October 10, 2012. The coalition is comprised of representatives from many sectors including:

Beaver County District Attorney, Sheriff, and Coroner; the Medical Director of Gateway Rehabilitation, the Executive Director of Medic Rescue, the Warden of our Beaver County Jail, the Beaver Falls Chiefs of Fire and Police Departments, the recovery community and family members of persons with addiction

Our first annual Town Hall meeting was held at CCBC on November 2, 2014 and we had 260 attendees. Mr. Michael Botticelli (United States “Drug Czar”) Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy requested to attend our Town Hall Meeting and speak to our audience. Throughout his two day visit to our county, Mr. Botticelli met with families in recovery as well as residents at GRC.

This engagement could not have occurred without the many people throughout our County and Region who donated their time and talent to begin a very important community-wide conversation about addiction and recovery.

The conversation continues.

Through the ongoing work of our Coalition we have identified the following action steps:

- The distribution of Naloxone (Narcan) to first responders throughout the county; and the development training, education and best practice guidelines
- The development of a warm hand off for overdose survivors to coordinate care between physical and behavioral health care systems
- The expansion of our Certified Recovery Specialist program

We have a long way to go and much work to do in this battle. It saddens me to know that more lives will be lost, more hearts broken. I am not idealistic or naïve to think that there is a magic wand we can wave, or a Gold Standard program or abundant funding to reverse the horrific problem of addiction and the collateral damage it continues to cause in our homes, neighborhoods, streets and communities. However, I am here with a message of hope that together we can do many things to continue these important conversations, to build and strengthen our partnerships, and to work together to restore wellness to our friends, family and neighbors.

Thank you all for your time, attention and interest in this very important matter.