

# Summit draws 'bipartisan' support in fight against opioids

By DOUG ALDEN | Union Leader | May 10

Broadcast:

<http://www.wmur.com/health/nh-to-provide-help-hotline-for-residents-struggling-with-drug-addiction/39468982>

MANCHESTER — At least one encouraging sign was clear from the start of a day-long summit on the opioid epidemic in New Hampshire. More than 800 people representing a wide range of fronts battling the health crisis packed in a large banquet room on Tuesday for the Governor's Summit on Substance Misuse. Treatment and recovery specialists, law enforcement agencies and experts on addiction and ways to prevent it were among the groups taking part in the summit.

"So many different partners here together, focused on this issue today really speaks to the integrated nature of our response," Gov. Maggie Hassan said. Hassan's remarks included some of the state's latest plans, including a 24/7 crisis hotline she said will be in service later this week. Hassan also cited the grim totals of more than 400 overdose deaths in the state last year.

"Thousands more overdosed, their lives saved only by the quick action of first responders, medical providers or family and friends," Hassan said. "This year we may be on pace to exceed those unprecedented numbers

." Hassan was the first of three featured speakers during the event. She was followed by Dr. Thomas McLellan, chairman and founder of the Research Institute, and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, who served two terms as governor of Iowa, Hassan said it was important to have a diverse group at the summit because the crisis of heroin and fentanyl overdoses affects everybody.

"It is devastating families, communities and business across New Hampshire, and it affects people from all walks of life in every corner of the state," Hassan said. "We are in the midst of a challenge that requires all hands on deck. We have to work together each and every day to combat this powerful epidemic and to help save lives."

The summit also included breakout sessions with experts leading discussions on prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery support. Manchester Police Chief Nick Willard was scheduled to lead a session on strategies for law enforcement agencies to help stem the number of lives being lost to opioids.

"Operation Granite Hammer" has been successful in getting large quantities of drugs and dealers off the street, but there is still a long fight ahead, Willard said. "I was pretty discouraged, given all the work that we've done in the past year and we're still losing citizens every day. But I'm starting to feel a change in that," Willard said. "The recovery community is becoming more robust. You're seeing HOPE for recovery NH expanding across the state and I think this is exactly what we need."

he Department of Health and Human Services, one of several agencies involved in hosting the summit, said the attendance was originally expected to be about 250 people. DHHS Commissioner Jeffrey Meyers, who introduced Hassan, noted in the packed Armory room at the Radisson that more than 800

people had registered. Willard noted that the full house indicated how much more seriously people are viewing the epidemic.

"It's tremendous," Willard said. "I just think everybody is coming together in a bipartisan way, and I think that's probably a testament to just how grave this issue is. It's not about your party affiliation. It's about human lives."

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## **Summit held to raise awareness of drug epidemic**

24-hour drug crisis hotline announced at event

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MANCHESTER, N.H. —Hundreds of people from different walks of life gathered Tuesday in Manchester to discuss ways to fight the state's drug crisis. Those in attendance said that changes come slowly, and events such as the summit help create awareness.

"Conferences like this bring together people who wouldn't normally be together and talk about these issues," said James Vara, the governor's adviser on addiction.

The summit was organized by the governor's office and other state agencies. Keynote speaker D. Thomas McLellan of the Treatment Research Institute, focused on prevention and treatment, saying it should be incorporated into mainstream health care.

"Require at least a one-semester course on addiction and pain management in every state medical, nursing, pharmacy school, and you will be ahead of the curve," he said.

McLellan said doctors should be able to recognize the signs of addiction early on before it becomes a serious problem, much like the monitoring that's done for other chronic illnesses.

"Those things work for almost every substance use disorder," he said. "They don't work once the person has fallen off a cliff and they need to be completely rehabilitated."

The summit included sessions on topics such as drug courts, ways to get help and providing community support.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack spoke about an interagency effort focused on combating the heroin epidemic in rural areas.

"This is a state that's raising the awareness of this problem," Vilsack said. "Once you raise the awareness and realize it's a disease and not some sort of character flaw, you can really begin to aggressively address it, and I think New Hampshire is doing that."

The governor also announced the creation of a new statewide hotline, which went into effect Tuesday.

News 9 called the hotline and was connected directly with a counselor answering the phone in Nashua.

The number to dial is 1-844-711-HELP.

Vara said the hotline will help people suffering find care.

“We are making a difference, in small, incremental changes,” Vara said. “It’s pieces of a puzzle. There is no quick fix to any of this.”

Vilsack said New Hampshire is aggressively addressing the crisis.

“When that glimmer of hope occurs in someone’s life, when they’re at the bottom of the barrel in terms of they’re going to go one direction or another – somebody is there to help,” Vilsack said.

“We try to connect people with services or invite them in right then and there,” said Melissa Crews, a board member of Hope for New Hampshire Recovery, which opened its third peer recovery community center in Concord this week.

Crews’ organization answers calls for help with drugs 24 hours a day through the state-run 211 hotline.

“I think it’s great for people to have options,” she said. “There are a lot of 24-hour hotlines out there, a lot of numbers that people can call. A lot of treatment providers have numbers that they do answer 24/7.”

Crews said the important part is having services available when someone calls for help.

Link to watch broadcast version:

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