

# Mayor Jon Mitchell represents New Bedford at National Mayors' Institute on Opioids

Mayor Jon Mitchell represented the City of New Bedford at the Mayors' Institute on Opioids hosted by the National League of Cities (NLC) on Wednesday, leading a delegation representing organizations in New Bedford.

New Bedford has taken a leadership role in working to prevent opioid abuse. The Greater New Bedford Opioid Prevention Task Force was formed three years ago to bring together key leaders and organizations to pool their efforts and have a greater impact. Co-Chaired by Dr. Michael Rocha and Police Chief Joe Cordeiro, with support from Reverend David Lima of the Interchurch Council and many other community groups, the Task Force has played an important role in several measures in New Bedford, including a drop-in center operating out of the Pilgrim United Church to provide support services and resources for both those struggling with opioid abuse and their families, as well as a program started in 2015 that brings outreach teams to homes within 24-48 hours of an overdose emergency. The joint teams are comprised of a plain-clothes police officer, a drug counselor, and clergyperson, and use the key period following an overdose to persuade those in need to agree to treatment.

New Bedford police are seizing the opportunity to encourage treatment at the very moment when someone is most in need of that message, given that police are often on the scene when someone suffering from opioid abuse is at a moment of acute medical or personal crisis. Also on the public safety front, New Bedford has been at the vanguard of communities deploying Narcan among its first responders.

In order to expand education and prevention early on, New Bedford Public Schools students receive consistent, age-appropriate substance use education from elementary school through high school, to ensure students build awareness in an age-appropriate manner before it is too late to begin to reach them. New Bedford's public schools have also partnered with Physicians to Prevent Opioid Abuse, People Acting Against Chemical Addiction (PAACA), and Seven Hills to hold parent nights at schools with physicians to share prevention practices.

The Mayors' Institute on Opioids, which took place in Boston, provided an opportunity for local leaders to engage in practical, solutions-oriented discussions and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. The immersive three-day event will be followed by 12 months of ongoing expert assistance tailored to each participating city's needs, with the work building on local efforts already underway.

Cities participating in the Mayors' Institute included Huntington, West Virginia; Knoxville, Tennessee; Madison, Wisconsin; Manchester, New Hampshire; New Bedford, Massachusetts; and Tacoma, Washington.

Participating mayors brought teams that included county and state officials. As is well recognized, there are no silver bullets and it will take cities working together and in collaboration with state and other local leaders to turn the tide to effectively address the challenge.

At the intensive three-day meeting, the group looked closely at their respective strengths and weaknesses and discussed key areas ranging from prevention, treatment and recovery to effective harm reduction efforts.

"Our country has struggled with how to respond to major substance abuse and mental health issues in the recent past, but we have an opportunity to learn from mistakes, and

ultimately prevent and treat individuals suffering from addiction,” said NLC President and CEO Clarence E. Anthony. “We must continue to understand what’s working, what’s not and build stronger paths forward. Our only chance at confronting and overcoming the opioid epidemic is to work together.”

Going forward, NLC will share best practices from the Mayors’ Institute, as well as additional lessons learned from the cities during the year of technical assistance that follows. The goal over the coming months is to create a ripple effect and provide information and insights that help every city leader who is grappling with this crisis.

For more information on NLC’s longstanding work on the opioid crisis, including recommendations from our Opioid Task Force, [click here](#).

To read the NLC Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) backgrounder on the Mayors’ Institute on Opioids [click here](#).

The National League of Cities is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities.