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PRESS RELEASE

TO: Marquette County Media

FROM: Terry Frankovich, M.D., M.P.H., Medical Director

DATE: April 29, 2019

SUBJECT: "New Points" Syringe Services Program to Begin Offering Services at Pathways in Marquette

Marquette County Health Department's (MCHD) "New Points" Syringe Service Program will begin offering services at Pathways (200 W. Spring Street) on May 7, 2019. New Points' first site opened last September at Upper Great Lakes **Sawyer** Family Health Center. Funding from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and NorthCare Network supports this project.

What is a Syringe Service Program (SSP)?

SSP's are community-based programs that provide access to sterile syringes and needles and other clean paraphernalia for individuals injecting street drugs, in order to prevent sharing of used equipment. New Points will also offer safe disposal of used needles and syringes, testing for HIV, hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted diseases, education about safer choices; and, referral to medical, mental health, and recovery services. The overarching goal is to reduce risk both for the clients using substances and the community as a whole; while helping clients move towards treatment and recovery. Syringe programs have long been shown to decrease the spread of blood borne infections in the community and to reduce substance use by getting individuals into treatment.

Why do we need this in Marquette County?

Marquette County, like much of the country, is experiencing an epidemic of opioid use. According to Dr. Teresa Frankovich, Medical Director for MCHD, "One of the consequences of this is an increasing burden of hepatitis C in our young adult population (18-29 years). In fact, the Upper Peninsula, as a region, has the highest hepatitis C rate for young adults in the entire State of Michigan." Hepatitis C is transmitted through contact with blood, and in the majority of cases, leads to chronic liver disease. It is a leading cause of liver cancer. It is often a silent disease in its early stages and most individuals are not aware they carry the virus. The cost of treatment for hepatitis C exceeds \$100,000 per person. "The vast majority of our young adults with hepatitis C have acquired it through intravenous drug use and the sharing of needles.

These same individuals are at very high risk of acquiring and spreading HIV," says Frankovich. "SSP's have been shown to decrease the spread of these infections in the communities they serve."

Why these locations?

Sawyer Family Health Center was chosen as the pilot site for Marquette County because the clinic offers medical, dental and mental health care on-site and plans to add substance abuse treatment as well. Locating services at Pathways will improve access for residents who live in Marquette's downtown area and will facilitate mental health referrals for SSP clients needing care. The overarching goal for SSP's is to bring people into the general and behavioral healthcare system and assist them in moving toward recovery. This co-location of services with health partners is a great fit.

What SSP's DO:

- Reduces drug use by succeeding in getting more people to enter into drug treatment and to stop injecting drugs.
- Reduces drug overdose deaths.
- Reduces needlestick injuries among local law enforcement officers.
- Reduces new HIV and hepatitis infections.
- Saves on healthcare costs by preventing disease.

What SSP's DO NOT DO:

- Increase crime.
- Increase IV drug use.

Emily Pratt, MCHD Health Educator and Project Coordinator for New Points notes, "This program is already helping the residents of Marquette County. We have taken in many used needles for safe disposal, helped prevent overdoses and have decreased risk of blood borne infections for everyone. We are all healthier and safer as a community when individuals with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) are brought into the medical and behavioral healthcare systems and offered the tools they need to make healthier choices. Syringe Services Programs are a proven, effective public health strategy to provide these tools."

For further information, please contact Emily Pratt at 906-315-2630.

Site Hours (walk-in services):

Upper Great Lakes Sawyer Family Health Center
Thursdays 2pm-5pm
301 Explorer St., Gwinn

Pathways
Tuesdays 1:30-4:30 pm
200 W. Spring St, Marquette