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Statewide News Release

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CHFS Teams Up with the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation to Combat Opiate Abuse Epidemic

FRANKFORT, Ky. (May 13, 2016) — The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) will host two forums addressing opiate abuse in Kentucky next week. The forums are designed to help Kentuckians gain a better understanding of the opioid abuse epidemic; identify resources for prevention and treatment; and help mobilize community efforts to solve this public health crisis.

CHFS, along with Bluegrass.org, Cumberland River Behavioral Health and national experts from the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, will hold the forums in Lexington and Corbin.

"We are at the forefront of a growing national problem," says CHFS Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson. "Opiate abuse is ravaging families and communities across Kentucky. Gov. Matt Bevin and I are enlisting all available resources to develop strategies that will mitigate the public health, economic and workforce development problems caused by the spread of opioid abuse."

The forums are part of the Supporting Mothers to Achieve Recovery through Treatment and Supports (SMARTS) initiative, a grant program funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Various departments within CHFS, including the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities and the Department for Public Health, Cumberland River Behavioral Health and Bluegrass.org are collaborating on SMARTS to establish a new system of care to treat pregnant and parenting women up to two years post-birth.

The first forum will be hosted by Bluegrass.org and will take place from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday, May 16 in Lexington at the Griffin Gate Marriott. Kentucky First Lady Glenna Bevin will be in attendance.

"Substance abuse has destroyed far too many Kentucky families," said Mrs. Bevin. "These forums allow law enforcement, medical professionals and the community to come together in tackling this issue as part of our commitment to families in our Commonwealth."

This forum will feature Judge Tim Feeley, CHFS deputy secretary, as well as the executive director of the Office of Drug Control Policy, Van Ingram.

“An estimated 310,000 Kentucky citizens have a diagnosable substance use disorder — dependence or abuse — for which treatment is indicated,” said Deputy Sec. Feeley. “To reverse Kentucky’s substance abuse and opiate problem, we have to engage our communities and connect people with the resources and treatment they need.”

“The Office of Drug Control Policy is proud to participate in the Bluegrass Forum,” said Ingram. “Hazelden Betty Ford is a longtime leader in the fight against substance use disorder and we are excited to have them in Kentucky.”

The second forum will be hosted by Cumberland River Behavioral Health from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 17 at the Corbin Technology Center. The Cumberland River forum will feature Secretary John Tilley of the Cabinet for Justice and Public Safety.

“The fight against opiates demands a multi-faceted approach, involving enforcement, treatment and prevention,” said Sec. Tilley. “The Justice Cabinet is proud to stand with this broad coalition as Kentucky continues to build on our efforts to stamp out this scourge.”

Dr. William Hacker, a well-known Appalachian physician and former commissioner for the Department for Public Health, will also be a featured speaker at Tuesday’s forum. Dr. Hacker currently serves as the chairman of the SOAR Community Health and Wellness Advisory Council.

“Drug abuse and addiction are critically important issues, especially in Eastern Kentucky,” said Dr. Hacker. “They not only cause serious health consequences, but they are also impeding economic development in the area. Everyone in the community must work together to address this epidemic.”

Registration for the Lexington forum has closed. Limited availability remains for the Corbin forum. To register online, visit <http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/event.view?eventId=5397088>. Media is welcome to attend both forums. For more information about the forums or the SMARTS initiative please contact Kris Shera at kristopherm.shera@ky.gov or by phone at (502) 782-7802.

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.