

## **Tackling Opioid Epidemic: Lawmakers Suggest Pharmacy Blister Packs, Required Drug Education**

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Mandate that schools educate students about illegal drugs. Mandate that blister packs be used for certain medications sold from pharmacies. Mandate secure medicine cabinets in new homes.

Those were some of the ideas lawmakers and others described at a recent legislative breakfast about drug abuse held by Communities 4 Action in Stamford.

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Darien First Selectman Jayme Stevenson said that although she hates the word mandate, schools should be required to educate young people about drugs and alcohol.

“We have to use our schools [...] to mandate certain health education around drug and alcohol abuse,” Stevenson said at the Dec. 19 meeting at UConn in Stamford. “It has to become fundamentally part of the public education system more than it is today.”

“I don’t believe HIPAA laws were intended to blockade the flow of information between colleges and universities and parents,” Stevenson continued. “There is a period when children go off to college to study, and by virtue of their age, parents are not privy to that information.”

Stevenson described the death of a young man from Darien who suffered a shoulder injury while away at college, and then got hooked on opioids at school without his parents knowing what was happening. “There just isn’t the right flow of information,” she said.

Stamford Mayor David Martin, who lost his wife to cancer recently, said: “If you think extra strength Tylenol is going to end cancer pain, then you’re confused. She was taking narcotics. She took less than what she was prescribed. But without it her pain and lack of joy would have been very difficult in her last couple of months.”

At the same time, Mayor Martin said the daughter of his close long term friends was a promising young woman who developed an opioid addiction problem.

“Her parents thought she had won her battle, but the battle never ceased and ultimately heroin took her,” he said. “I don’t know if I could take losing a daughter.”

Mayor Martin said in summer Stamford’s Alive@Five concert series on Thursday nights no longer allows people under 21.

“It’s a fabulous event that has brought a lot of life back into Stamford and it’s part of our renaissance. At the same time, despite our strongest efforts to restrict the drinking of alcohol from minors, it was an impossible task,” he said.

Mayor Martin said in 2015 there were a half dozen people under 18, who arrived at the Alive@Five event via Metro-North so inebriated, they had to be taken to the hospital.

The presenters and legislators discussed the value of secure boxes for medications in households.

## **Narcotics in the Home**

“There has been a huge increase in home health care and home hospice,” said Jeff Holland of Communities 4 Action.

Holland said patients don’t always get the benefit of their prescription medications because they are a temptation to others in the home.

“I’ve heard of cases of where these medications have been taken and replaced with aspirin,” he said.

“Medications are being diverted,” Holland continued. “Most of the rest of the world uses blister packs, which give better control. You know when something is missing from a blister pack. But, if two pills are taken from a bottle, you never know. Blister packs also help with patient adherence.”

“Homes are becoming hospitals,” Holland said. “There are no controls for locking these drugs up [...] It would be terrific if there was just one cabinet or one closet that could be secured.”

Holland suggested to the legislators that the secure cabinets might be required through the building code, though the legislators said they were reluctant to push for a mandate.

Stevenson said she wished all pharmacies could be required to offer blister packaging for prescription medications.

Stephanie Paulmeno said people are getting narcotics from family medicine cabinets, contributing to increases in abuses of opioid prescription medications. Also she said, this has contributed to an increase in poisonings of children and worsened the opioid crisis.

“Due to the vulnerable position many of our seniors are in, it makes sense to require professionals who offer them services to be credentialed,” suggested State Rep Fred Camillo following the breakfast. “We all have experienced or known of instances where an elderly family member and or friend has been taken advantage of by someone who was not properly certified, credentialed, and vetted.”

Camillo said that if there were an industry that begs for oversight, it is this. “To that end, I will be introducing legislation with my colleagues to address this issue and assure those that need protection from fraud are given it.”

Greenwich First Selectman Peter Tesei said the Greenwich Social Services Department and Liberation programs recently published a study on the opioid abuse problem showing that the group of drugs is widely available, particularly for young people who don't understand the consequences.

“Our goal is to initially acknowledge that there is no shame in admitting that you have an addiction,” Tesei said. “People are often are timid in acknowledging they have an issue or are overcome by the power of these drugs.”

More on [Communities 4 Action](#) can be found online.

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***See also:***

- [Himes: New Federal Legislation Will Help Combat Opioid Epidemic](#)
- [GHS School Resource Officer Franco Shares What the Kids Are Up To: Vaping THC Extracts](#)