OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Milwaukee County Releases $11M to Support Opioid Abatement & Harm Reduction Projects, Unveils First of Dozens of 'Harm Reduction Vending Machines' to Combat Death from Overdose

The first of many initiatives made possible with Milwaukee County's Opioid Settlement Funds

MILWAUKEE, WI – Today, Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, Chief Health Policy Advisor Dr. Ben Weston, Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) officials, and Behavioral Health Services (BHS) gathered to celebrate the release of $11 million in funding for 15 projects to combat the opioid epidemic and unveil the first "Harm Reduction Vending Machine" in Milwaukee County to reduce death from overdose, located at the Marcia P. Coggs Human Services Center, 1220 W. Vliet St., first floor. The machine will provide free access to harm reduction and prevention supplies, including Fentanyl test strips, nasal Narcan, medication deactivation pouches, lock bags, and gun locks. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), harm reduction is an evidence-based practice to prevent death for people who use drugs. In 2021, there were 644 drug overdose deaths in Milwaukee County.

"Death from overdose is a terrible crisis facing our community. We are working to address this crisis with a multi-faceted approach across County departments," **said Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley.** "The harm reduction vending machines are an important first step in deploying opioid settlement funds to prevent death from overdose. I am hopeful the many projects funded by the opioid settlement will have a significant impact, and I welcome the community partners who will be joining us in our efforts to save lives."

In its first meeting of 2023, the County Board approved allocating $11 million in opioid settlement funds to support 15 projects over the next three fiscal years – including harm reduction supplies, education and treatment for justice involved youth, and opioid prevention projects. Milwaukee County has among the highest rates of overdose deaths in Wisconsin, and in the last two years the county has seen record numbers of emergency calls related to overdoses.

Today's bill signing releases millions to support data driven strategies and tactics to combat the opioid epidemic – harm reduction vending machines are some of the first initiatives funded with opioid settlement funds. The vending machine installed in the Marcia P. Coggs building is the first of 25 machines that will be placed throughout Milwaukee County over a three-year period from 2023 to 2025. Efforts will be made over the next three years to deploy vending machines strategically throughout all of the county, with the first machines being placed in areas with the highest incidence of death from overdose, according to the data.

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The process is underway to determine the locations for the machines. Businesses, religious organizations, non-profits, and behavioral health service providers in Milwaukee County are invited to disseminate harm reduction and prevention supplies to residents by hosting a machine for free. To host a Harm Reduction Vending Machine, organizations can apply here by March 31, 2023. Vivent Health's Lifepoint program and HRI Vending are Harm Reduction Vending Machine project partners.

"The opioid settlement funds are bringing an infusion of resources to Milwaukee County as we move urgently and strategically to combat the overdose epidemic. We are taking a data-driven and transparent approach to determine where the greatest need is for harm reduction," **said Dr. Ben Weston, Milwaukee County Chief Health Policy Advisor and Director of Medical Services, Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management.** "We have seen a deeply troubling increase in death from overdose the past couple of years, and we are working to reverse that trend and address this public health emergency."

DHHS will be implementing seven opioid settlement funded projects. Through the "Coordination of Opioid Prevention Services Project," DHHS will regrant funds to community-based organizations to increase prevention capacity and coordination. This project builds on DHHS' track record of participatory and collaborative regranting processes. In February, community conversations were held soliciting input on how the regranted funds should be invested. Over the next several months, DHHS will review information gathered, develop a Request for Proposal (RFP), host an applicant information session, and announce the organizations that will be receiving the funds. For more information, visit the opioid settlement site.

"At DHHS, our goal is to build capacity to maximize prevention activities and grassroots outreach. Hearing from the community is tremendously helpful in developing an RFP to deploy funds into the community, in the most impactful way possible," **said Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Executive Director, Department of Health & Human Services.** "We are optimistic about the opportunities we have to partner with community-based organizations on new and innovative approaches to harm reduction and amplify effective strategies currently underway."

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