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REPORT: Law Enforcement Leaders say
“Stopping the Opioid Crisis Begins at Home”
Illinois State’s Attorneys, Sheriffs, and Police Chiefs release report
on role of prevention in stemming opioid abuse

Springfield, Illinois — A statewide organization of police chiefs, sheriffs, and state’s attorneys released a report today on the severity of the opioid epidemic in Illinois, and evidence-based prevention efforts that can be a key component of the response to that epidemic.

The [report](#), based on recent research, finds that individuals who experienced several Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are significantly more likely to misuse or become addicted to opioids later in life. Prevention efforts targeted at reducing ACEs are necessary, therefore, to reducing opioid abuse.

“We’re taking measures to address this crisis through law enforcement and action in the courts,” said Lake County State’s Attorney Michael Nerheim at a press conference held in the State Capitol. “It’s prevention though – starting in early childhood – that is the missing piece of the puzzle.”

“[Stopping the Opioid Crisis Begins at Home](#)” highlights the role of home visiting programs — voluntary programs in which nurses or other trained professionals coach at-risk parents during pregnancy or during the first three years of a child’s life — in reducing ACEs.

“In the short-term,” said Winnebago County State’s Attorney Joe Bruscato, “these programs can help addicted parents achieve sobriety by connecting them with treatment. Long-term, home visiting is proven to prevent children’s exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences. That, in turn, can reduce the likelihood of opioid abuse later in life. Home visiting can turn a vicious cycle into a virtuous cycle.”

Nerheim and Bruscato were joined in Springfield by ten other Illinois law enforcement leaders in supporting continued funding for the Healthy Families Illinois and Parents Too Soon programs, both funded through the Illinois Department of Human Services. The officials also called for an increase in the Illinois State Board of Education’s Early Childhood Block Grant, which supports preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, as well as critical birth-to-3 services including home visiting.

“If we can get struggling parents the services they need now,” said Bartonville Police Chief Brian Fengel, “maybe my officers won’t have to save their kids from an overdose in the future.”

The law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids are prioritizing anti-opioid efforts because of the scope of the problem in Illinois: the state saw a 76 percent increase in opioid overdose deaths from 2013 to 2016, and the rate of babies born with opioid withdrawal — also known as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome — increased 53 percent from 2011 to 2016.

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The report, in concluding that there is a correlation between Adverse Childhood Experiences and later opioid abuse, cites two recent studies: one found that 49% of patients seeking treatment for opioid addiction reported having experienced four or more ACEs as children – more than three times the percentage of adults in Illinois’ general population reporting that many ACEs. The second study found that children who experienced more than four childhood traumas were three times more likely to abuse prescription pain relievers, and five times more likely to engage in injection drug use in adulthood, than their counterparts who did not experience any traumas.

In pointing to the beneficial role of home visiting programs, the **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** report cites national studies finding that families who participated in the Nurse-Family Partnership’s home visiting program had half as many incidents of child abuse and neglect compared with the control group.

“In law enforcement,” said Christian County Sheriff Bruce Kettelkamp, “we pride ourselves on getting out ahead of a problem. And to get ahead of the opioid problem, we’ve got to start talking more about prevention — and *working* on prevention.”

The law enforcement leaders of **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** emphasized that evidence-based prevention programs were just part of a multi-pronged approach, which includes law enforcement efforts to put dealers behind bars, direct addicts to treatment, save lives through the use of naloxone, and take action in the courts.

“There’s certainly no single solution to the opioid crisis,” said Union County State’s Attorney Tyler Edmonds. “But we’re here today to say: Our approach is incomplete and insufficient if it doesn’t include appropriate attention to prevention, and the role of proven early childhood investments.”

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois is a bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization of over 300 police chiefs, sheriffs, state’s attorneys, leaders of police officer organizations and victims of violence.

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