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Editorials

## Daily Herald opinion: Counties remain committed to battling opioid epidemic



The Kane County Health Department is partnering with the Kane County Cougars to educate people about the dangers of misusing opioids and to provide resources like naloxone. *Shaw Local News Network*

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After seeing the death toll from opioid-related overdoses rise steadily through the years, some suburban counties have received a rare bit of good news.

DuPage County officials recently reported that deaths due to drug overdoses dropped 24% in 2023 compared to the year before. The county had 150 overdose deaths in 2022 and 114 in 2023.

“I was so surprised that I had to look at it (the data) again and again,” DuPage Coroner Dr. Richard Jorgensen said in April.

In neighboring Kane County, officials say the county had 71 opioid-related deaths in 2023 — four fewer deaths compared to 2022.

There also is a glimmer of hope on the national level.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says provisional data shows that an estimated 107,543 drug overdose deaths happened last year in the United States. That is a slight decrease from 2022, according to the agency.

Still, it is not lost on us that having more than 100,000 overdose deaths in one year nationwide is staggering.

So, we applaud local officials for everything they are trying to do to address the opioid epidemic, which has been fueled by synthetic opioids — primarily illegally manufactured fentanyl.

Last week, the Kane County Health Department announced a new partnership with the Kane County Cougars to educate people about the dangers of opioid misuse and the importance of overdose prevention.

As part of the collaboration, there will be public awareness campaigns, community outreach events, and training Cougars staff on how to administer the opioid overdose antidote called naloxone.

“The opioid crisis continues to affect many families in our community,” said Michael Isaacson, executive director of the Kane County Health Department. “Through this collaboration, we hope to increase awareness, provide essential resources, and ultimately save lives.”

The announcement about the partnership comes after Kane health officials launched the “Your Story Matters” campaign, a series of videos highlighting the testimonies of people with close ties to the epidemic.

Isaacson said the number of opioid-related deaths in Kane County has gone down “because of a lot of work that many organizations in the community are doing,” including an effort to make naloxone available for people who need it.

Still, he says, the number of deaths from opioids is too high. “We still have a lot of work to do to protect people,” Isaacson said.

DuPage officials have taken the same approach. As a result, the county has developed a variety of programs and initiatives to respond to the epidemic, including drug treatment at its jail and a drug court.

Despite the drop that some counties experienced last year, the number of deaths caused by opioids remains alarming. Therefore, it’s encouraging to have officials in Kane, DuPage and other counties remain committed to finding a lasting solution to save lives.