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STATE PLAN TO REDUCE PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE RELEASED TODAY

Prescription drug abuse has become one of the most serious public health and safety threats facing our state today.

To deal with this issue, a task force appointed at the direction of Gov. Mary Fallin released today Oklahoma's plan to reduce prescription drug abuse. The panel was made up of state agencies representing treatment and prevention, the health and medical community, law enforcement, education and other entities.

"A State Plan: Reducing Prescription Drug Abuse in Oklahoma" covers community and public education; provider and prescriber education; disposal and storage; tracking and monitoring; regulations and enforcement; as well as treatment and prevention.

"We must get serious about addressing prescription drug abuse in our state," said Fallin. "Prescription drug abuse is Oklahoma's fastest growing drug problem and it harms our state in multiple ways. It is a quality of life issue, as well as an issue that affects the economic bottom line of our state in such ways as poverty and prison overcrowding.

"Hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans are impacted either directly, through personal experiences including the struggles of family and friends, or indirectly, via increasing demand on tax dollars to deal with the consequences," she said. "It is a silent epidemic that is surfacing with a vengeance."

Oklahoma ranks among the highest in the nation in prescription painkiller sales, and third nationally in opioid-related overdose deaths. Although prescription drug abuse or misuse occurs in people of all ages, Oklahomans age 35-54 have the highest death rate of any age group for prescription-related overdoses.

Terri White, commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, said prescription drug abuse is a concern all Oklahoma communities are facing.

"Becoming addicted to prescription medication may begin innocently," she said. "Often, people obtain prescriptions for the right reasons, but that can turn into abuse or dependency if misused. There's also intentional misuse of these medications, when

people take them from medicine cabinets or buy them 'off the street.' To appropriately address this issue, we must look at all aspects of the problem, which this report has done. Fortunately, prescription drug abuse is a substance abuse disorder that can be treated and, perhaps more importantly, prevented."

In addition to Gov. Fallin and Commissioner White, other agency directors aligned in this effort attended a state Capitol press conference to unveil report." They included Dr. Terry Cline, commissioner of the Oklahoma State Department of Health and Oklahoma secretary of health and human services; and Darrell Weaver, director of the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Control. Craig and Gail Box of Enid, whose son, Austin, a star linebacker for the University of Oklahoma football team died of a prescription drug overdose, also spoke.

The state is also moving forward with a campaign to comprehensively address prescription drug prevention, which includes creating a website, www.TakeasPrescribed.org and public outreach efforts.

A copy of the state plan to reduce prescription drug abuse is available at www.odmhsas.org.

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