



Arlene González-Sánchez, M.S., L.M.S.W.
Commissioner

Howard A. Zucker
Commissioner

MaryEllen Elia
Commissioner

Dear Colleague:

As you may recall, last year, we shared important information about the problem of heroin use and prescription opioid misuse. Heroin use is part of a larger substance abuse problem. Those who become addicted to heroin, often use alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and opioid painkillers, before using heroin. In fact, individuals and families who have shared their personal experiences with the disease of addiction note that alcohol and cannabinoids, including marijuana, are usually the first substances used, particularly by young adults under the age of 18. Addiction is a progressive disease and the use of these “gateway” substances is serious. Addressing this issue early may help to prevent progression to other harmful substances.

Community leaders and members may need guidance regarding how to start the conversation about substance abuse within their community, with parents and with young people. We are writing today to let you know that New York State has tools that can help foster productive discussions on this topic in a public community forum or in another small public or private setting.

Recently, the New York State Combat Heroin and Prescription Opioid Abuse [Kitchen Table Toolkit](#) was launched to assist anyone including community leaders, parents, teachers, coaches, and healthcare providers in having conversations about addiction, the progression of addiction, and the increase in prescription opioid misuse and heroin use. The toolkit includes first-hand stories from real New Yorkers about warning signs, denial and hope. Young people in recovery share their struggles, including their progression to addiction, their loss of friendships, and the strong hold addiction had on their lives. Key elements of the toolkit are YouTube videos and guidance documents to assist with conversations about this serious topic. [Video 1](#) is designed to assist with conversations with adults and [Video 2](#) is geared toward discussions with young people. The toolkit also includes guidance documents to assist with planning and holding [community forums](#) as well as having age appropriate [conversations with young people](#). This information is free to download at: <http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov/kitchen-table-toolkit>.

Another resource is the state’s [Talk2Prevent website](#) that includes tools to help parents and other adults talk to their children and young people about the risks of underage drinking. Research has shown that youth who start drinking before age 15 are **six times** more likely to develop alcohol dependence or abuse later in life than those who begin drinking at or after age 21.ⁱ Since research also shows that parents are the number one influence on whether a teen chooses to drink, the Talk2Prevent website focuses on encouraging regular conversations between parents and their children on the topic.

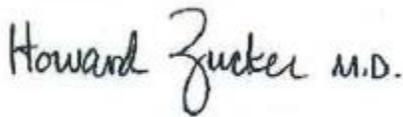
We hope you find both of these resources useful and that you’ll download the free materials to share and distribute. Please also share the following links on your websites: <http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov/kitchen-table-toolkit> and <http://talk2prevent.ny.gov/>.

Please keep in mind that addiction can happen to anyone, to any family, and at any time. We believe by working together, everyone can help make a difference. We urge you to join us in the fight against addiction. Anyone in need of help for addiction should call the New York State HOPEline at **1-877-8-HOPENY** or text: **HOPENY (Short Code: 467369)**.

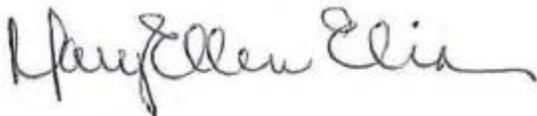
Sincerely,



Arlene González-Sánchez, M.S., L.M.S.W.
Commissioner
New York State Office of Alcoholism &
Substance Abuse Services



Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner
New York State Health Department



MaryEllen Elia
Commissioner of Education and President
of the University of the State of New York

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings* [PDF-3.2MB]. NSDUH Series H-48, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4863. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.