



BARBALUNGA FOR SHERIFF

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“Time For Change – Justice That Works”

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INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY - BARBALUNGA SEES NEW HOPE FOR RELEASED INMATES TO REDUCE OPIOID OVERDOSES BY IMPROVING RELEASE PROCESS AND TREATMENT CONTINUITY

BERKSHIRE COUNTY—As we mark International Overdose Awareness Day today, it’s important to remember that people discharged from jails are 120 times more likely than the overall population in Massachusetts to overdose on opioids. But sheriff candidate **Alf Barbalunga** says new research findings from UMass Amherst, UMass Chan Medical School, and the Tufts School of Medicine, show promising results by making three critical changes to the Medication Assistance Therapy (MAT) programs now offered in county jails across the Commonwealth.

Barbalunga says researchers are recommending the following 3 changes should be made to improve the medication program:

1. **Bridge doses:** Individuals being released from jail need medication to cover them until they can connect with a treatment program in the community.
2. **Better communication:** Solid, consistent communication is required between staff working with an incarcerated person while inside the jail and the community-based staff outside to facilitate a smooth transition.
3. **Phone access:** Individuals who are released must be given access to a cellphone so they can connect with an outside treatment program.

Barbalunga says inmates who are discharged after hours or just before the weekend, may fall into a “no care zone,” unsure of where to get their next treatment. “You can be discharged from jail with a prescription,” Barbalunga notes, “but if you don’t have a driver’s license or you don’t have a cell phone, it will be a challenge to schedule an appointment at a treatment center in the community.” “Lack of money, food, a place to live, transportation, health insurance and a job can make it hard for a person in recovery to stay clean,” Barbalunga explains. “These barriers are called the “social determinants of health.” He said “patient navigators” working inside the jail--and in the community--- can ensure a smooth transition to community resources, dealing with the financial, legal, clinical and social supports they need. Researchers say dealing with these 3 recommendations could save hundreds—if not thousands---of lives.

In 2007, Barbalunga helped establish a community-based Berkshire Partnership in Care Pilot Program in Berkshire County—more than a decade before state law mandated Medically Assisted Treatment programs in county jails.

“Jails can coordinate with community-based healthcare networks to make our community safer and healthier,” Barbalunga says. “Even though the Berkshire County Jail did not join the Medication Assistance Treatment program in the beginning, most sheriffs now agree that MAT has shown great promise in reducing the risk of fatal opioid overdoses among people being discharged from jail.

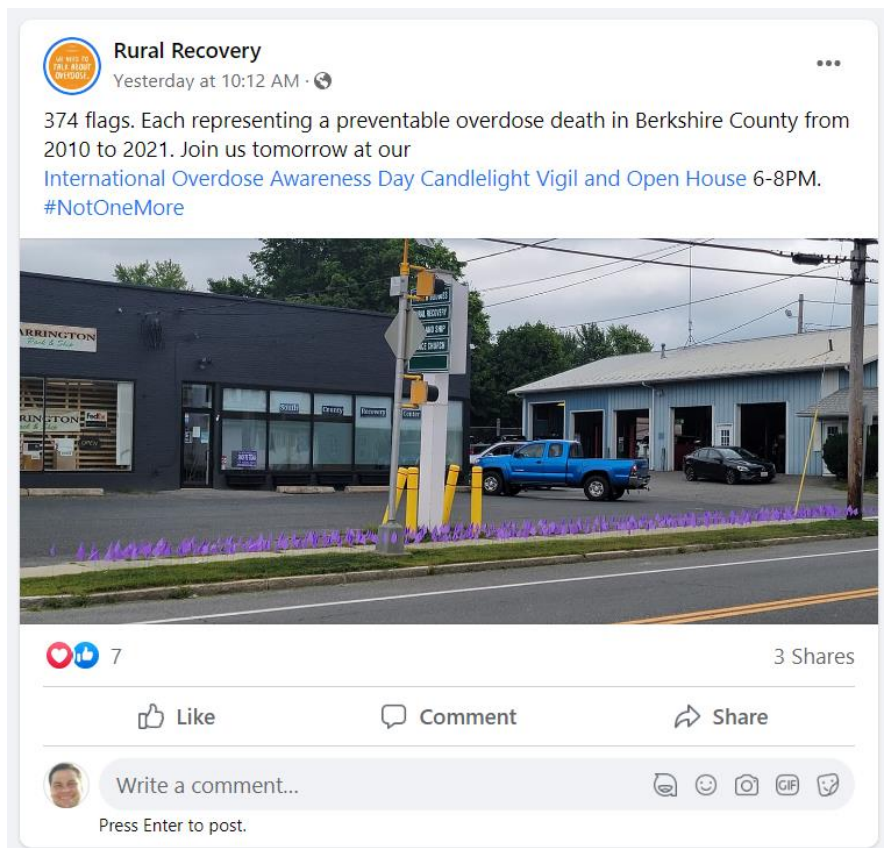
“As sheriff, I will make sure our inmates get continuous medication support as they transition back to the community, dealing with the ‘social barriers’ that must also be addressed,” Barbalunga says. “A successful transition back to the community depends on our diligent follow through into the community setting.”

This new research on Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) is part of a 5-year project called the Massachusetts Justice Community Opioid Innovation Network (JCOIN). These research findings were published August 11 in [the International Journal of Drug Policy](#).

Barbalunga says the research is timely as the State marks the deaths of those who have died from addiction and overdose. “I just read an article in the [Boston Herald](#) the other day,” says Barbalunga. This is why I am still upset about the “abstinence programs” of the past.

According to the Herald, “Every five to six hours for the last 10 years, a resident of the commonwealth has died of an overdose — from 2011 to 2021, that’s 20,000 Bay Staters taken by a common condition with an uncommon amount of stigma.”

“Today is the International Overdose Awareness Day Candlelight Vigil in Great Barrington,” says Barbalunga. “They marked 374 flags for all of the preventable opiate overdose in Berkshire County from 2010-2021. These are lives we might have saved if our system had been operating differently, we always have to strive to do better. Hopefully, with awareness, and better research, we will do better.”



Please join Rural Recovery at South County Recovery Center 67 State Road in Great Barrington today, from 6:00PM-8:00PM for an open house followed by an International Overdose Awareness Day Candlelight Vigil.

TIME FOR CHANGE



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