

Their “Lonely Drop-Box Project” represents a community engagement effort to tackle the ever-growing opioid and addiction crisis raging across the nation.

Opioids are a class of drugs that reduce pain by switching off opioid pain receptors in the brain and throughout the body. Opioids include the illegal drug heroin and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, and others.

Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time as prescribed by a doctor, but they can be misused or taken without a doctor’s prescription. Regular use—even prescribed by a doctor— can lead to dependence and can lead to overdose incidents and deaths. Misuse of opioids has fueled a nationwide epidemic.

Fortunately, the educators and students at BCAT are doing their part to fight the opioid and addiction crisis and as a class project have completed construction of their second medication drop-box.

The first one was placed in the Roanoke County Sheriff’s Office in Salem. Records show it is filled to capacity approximately every six weeks. The newest BCAT drop-box has been built for the Vinton Police Department.

“The Vinton Police Department will be tackling the ever-growing opioid crisis by installing a drop-box for disposal of unwanted, unneeded medicines,” said Capt. Fabricio Drumond, Vinton Deputy Chief of Police.

“The new drop-box is still being completed by the students at Burton,” said Drumond.

“They are doing an amazing job. There is no exact time-line for delivery; it will be a matter of a week or two.

“The drop-box will be installed in the lobby of our Police Department at the rear Municipal Building entrance near our front doors,” he explained. “Access to the drop-box will be during normal office hours, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

“This was a collaboration between agencies to better address the seriousness of the problem we are facing today; increasing the number of drop-boxes will better the chances

of proper disposal," Drumond said. "In addition, Vinton and our neighboring agencies, have had tremendous success in the Drug Take Back Program; this program will work in conjunction to it.

"Any prescription medicine can be dropped off; the goal is to afford residents additional opportunities to get unwanted, unneeded medicine from homes and disposed of quickly and safely," said Drumond. "Routine maintenance and disposal will be conducted by the Roanoke County Sheriff's Office."

The drop-box project is led by the Prevention Council of Roanoke County, along with law enforcement agencies. They hope to increase the number of medication disposal drop-boxes in the 26-county "neighborhood" of the newly formed "Urgent Love Initiative."

The 26-county area includes local counties and also extends from Highland County in the north, to Grayson County in southwestern Virginia, and to Henry County in the southeastern part of the state.

There are 217 chain-store, independently owned, and franchise pharmacies in the region, including 61 CVS/Target pharmacies, 27 Walgreen/RiteAid pharmacies, 30 Walmart/Sam's Club pharmacies, and 22 Kroger pharmacies.

The law enforcement community says that keeping prescription medications off the streets is of "paramount importance." Medications in the home are vulnerable to being stolen by anyone who has access to those areas, including children, their friends, relatives, neighbors, housekeepers, and contractors.

The Prevention Council says, "In-store medication disposal drop-boxes located inside a pharmacy at the point-of-sale provides the most intuitive and logical solution for customers to safely and conveniently dispose of their unused medications." However, currently only eight of the 217 pharmacies in the region offer customers in-store drop-boxes. In comparison, 17 local law enforcement agencies do so.

The need for these drop-boxes has been clearly demonstrated by the amount of medications collected during twice-yearly National Prescription Drug Take Back Days

facilitated by local law enforcement agencies, including ones at the Vinton and Bonsack Kroger stores.

On the Drug Take Back Day in October 2017, approximately 2.75 tons of medications were collected in the same 26-county area.

Unfortunately, the ability for citizens to safely and conveniently dispose of medications is a daily need, not a bi-annual one. Local data collected indicates that up to 71 percent of prescribed pills go unused; up to 92 percent of patients have unused opioids after surgery; 90 percent fail to dispose of leftover medications properly; 14 percent of patients who fill prescriptions do not take any of the pills; and 77 percent report their opioids are not stored in locked containers.

At the press conference, members of the Urgent Love Initiative emphasized that pharmacies need to step up and “do their part to help address the local addiction crisis, increase their level of customer care, and demonstrate their concern for the local community” by providing convenient point-of-sale medication disposal drop boxes.

Prevention Council Executive Director Nancy Hans says that Walgreen’s has many such medication drop-boxes “to the north and south of us. Our hope is that Walgreen’s will continue to add them here in our 26-county area. Currently, there are only three actual pharmacy drop-boxes in our Roanoke Valley and the fourth one will be in Vinton.”

Citizens can help by asking their pharmacies to join the effort and provide drop-off boxes at their businesses. Four thousand prepared postcards are being mailed by local citizens to the CEOs of the four largest chain store pharmacies doing business in the region which covers 13,000 square miles.

The Urgent Love Initiative and the Lonely Drop-Box Project are the Prevention Council’s innovative effort to directly address the local addiction crisis. The Prevention Council is a partnership of parents, youth, school, faith, law enforcement, business, medical, and other community leaders. Their ultimate goal is to identify the critical risk behaviors and substance abuse issues that threaten the health and development of the local community.

Urgent Love says that the pathway to addiction “typically starts by way of legally prescribed medications after injury or an accident. It’s an equal-opportunity addiction, affecting our neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family, many of whom are dying.”

For more information on the Urgent Love Initiative and what you can do to help, visit www.UrgentLove.org. More information on the local Prevention Council may be found online at www.roanokeprevention.org.