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Cities, counties announce joint task force on opioid abuse epidemic

Washington, D.C. -- The National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National League of Cities (NLC) today announced the creation of a joint national task force to address our nation's opioid and heroin abuse crisis. The City-County Task Force Addressing Heroin and Opioid Abuse, comprised of city and county leaders from across the country, aims to enhance awareness, facilitate peer exchanges and identify sound policy and partnership solutions.

This task force builds on the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy's four-pillared plan to reduce prescription drug abuse: education, monitoring, proper medication disposal and enforcement.

NACo and NLC elected leaders will explore proven practices for community prevention and overdose response, effective treatment options and public safety enforcement and supply reduction. NACo and NLC will share opportunities, challenges and issues local jurisdictions face when addressing opioid and heroin abuse in our communities.

"We see the devastating effects of prescription drug abuse and heroin use because counties are at the intersection of the local health, justice and public safety systems," said NACo Pres. Sallie Clark. "Addressing this issue is a top priority for local leaders. This new initiative will build on our efforts to mitigate this crisis and strengthen the safety and security of our neighborhoods."

Counties and cities have recognized that the opioid and heroin abuse crisis has reached epidemic proportions. Drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, with more than 47,000 lethal drug overdoses in 2014. This epidemic is driven largely by overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers (18,893) and deaths related to heroin (10,574). There were 259 million opioid prescriptions written in 2012, which is more than enough to give a pill bottle to every American adult.

"The rapidly increasing number of deaths from heroin overdoses and other opioids has reached epidemic proportions," said National League of Cities President Melodee Colbert-Kean, councilmember, Joplin, Mo. "The National League of Cities is pleased to partner with county leaders at NACo to provide coordinated, intergovernmental solutions to this tragic problem."

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The task force will take the following actions:

- Conduct at least two national dialogues where city and county elected leaders will explore the comprehensive issues related to this crisis, growing trends and proven responses
- Develop educational opportunities for counties and cities through special forums, educational workshops, webinars and other opportunities, and
- Publish a national summary report of city-county collaboration, focusing on community prevention and overdose response, effective treatment options, public safety enforcement and supply reduction.

Cities and counties across the country experience firsthand the impact of this epidemic. Local leaders are committed to join together to emphasize local solutions to address substance abuse and its impacts on residents and communities.

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service. More information at: www.naco.org.

The National League of Cities (NLC) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. www.nlc.org