



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Announces Year One Findings from Stigma Reduction Campaign, Life Unites Us
Nearly Four Million Pennsylvanians Reached in Year One

Harrisburg, PA – Today, the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP), in partnership with Penn State Harrisburg’s [Douglas W. Pollock Center for Addiction Outreach and Research](#), [The Public Good Projects \(PGP\)](#), and [Shatterproof](#), announced findings from the first year of the [Life Unites Us](#) campaign, an evidence-based approach to reducing the stigma of opioid use disorder (OUD).

“For decades, stigma has cast a shadow over people battling substance use disorder and their families, and that must change,” said DDAP Secretary Jen Smith. “We are thrilled that within the first year of this campaign, attitudes have improved toward medication-assisted treatment, harm reduction tactics, and overall views of individuals struggling with this disease. We know there is still work to be done, and we are looking forward to continuing this critical work, with these great partners, and expanding the scope of the Life Unites Us campaign.”

Life Unites Us [launched](#) in September 2020 and utilizes social media to spread stories of individuals and their family members battling OUD, hosts webinars sharing tools and information to effectively reduce stigma, and maintains an interactive data dashboard detailing the campaign’s progress.

In the first 12 months of the campaign, nearly four million Pennsylvanians were reached with information and messaging to encourage stigma reduction. More than 200 individuals in recovery, as well as their family members, recorded testimonials that were shared on the campaign’s website and social media channels. In addition, the campaign hosted 12 webinars across numerous topics related to stigma reduction with more than 1,200 attendees.

“These outstanding results show important momentum in changing damaging attitudes and behaviors toward those with substance use disorder and are a testament to the power of a contact-based intervention,” said Gary Mendell Shatterproof Founder and CEO. “We applaud the leadership of Secretary Smith and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for taking the bold step to implement this impactful campaign and continuing the campaign to make change for the future.”

“Results like these are rare in public health, and never guaranteed. If there’s a secret sauce, it’s good old-fashioned public health, and a methodology called ‘collective impact.’ The Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, two specialized nonprofits, Penn State Harrisburg, and hundreds of community organizations across the treatment and recovery community all work in concert. That work is designed to surface real people’s experience with addiction, in every corner of the state. Those stories, along with facts and frequently updated data are shared with millions of Pennsylvanians, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Guiding it all is a rigorous evaluation that tells everybody whether we’re making an impact as we go,” said Dr. Joe Smyser, PhD, MSPH, Chief Executive Officer of PGP.

A survey of Pennsylvanians conducted one year after campaign launch found several trends, including greater willingness to live with someone and continue a relationship with a friend struggling with OUD. Pennsylvanians also indicated higher willingness to provide naloxone to friends and family of people with OUD, and openness to having opioid treatment centers located near their homes. Some additional findings from the one-year follow-up survey include:

- 80% of respondents who viewed the campaign agreed that the opioid epidemic is a serious problem in their community; compared to 61.9% of respondents who did not view the campaign.
- 39.2% of respondents who viewed the campaign agreed that buprenorphine, medication-assisted treatment for OUD, is effective; compared to 25.8% of respondents who did not view the campaign.
- 35% of respondents who viewed the campaign agreed that their local government has strong policies to support people with OUD; compared to 17.2% of respondents who did not view the campaign.
- 60.8% of respondents who viewed the campaign agreed that their community has programs to help people with OUD; compared to 38.2% of respondents who did not view the campaign.

“The reach, exposure, and partner engagement of the campaign during the first year was incredible and exceeded our expectations. Utilizing an evidence-based approach, rigorous ongoing mixed-methods research techniques, and continuous feedback from community stakeholders allowed our team to evaluate levels of stigma throughout the state,” said Douglas W. Pollock Center for Addiction Outreach and Research Director, Weston Kensinger, Ph.D., CHES. “What we found was significant positive outcomes after just one year of the campaign, and that we’re moving the needle in the right direction to reduce substance use disorder stigma. We know that positive changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to reduce stigma does not happen overnight, by chance, or through the work of siloed stakeholders. As the campaign progresses, our entire team looks forward to continuing this important life-saving work, engaging with additional stakeholders across the state to reduce stigma, providing needed resources, and ultimately saving lives.”

Throughout year two, Life Unites Us will expand to address stigma related to stimulants and polysubstance use, issues which are on the rise in Pennsylvania and

nationally. In Pennsylvania, treatment admissions where stimulants were the primary substance increased from 11 percent to 16 percent from 2018 to 2020, and stimulants are the most common secondary substance of those admitted to substance use treatment. Since 2018, approximately one out of four callers to Pennsylvania's Get Help Now Hotline are seeking treatment for stimulant use.

The statewide campaign is funded by \$1.9 million in federal grant funding and is part of DDAP's [2019-2022 Strategic Plan](#) goal of reducing the stigma of substance use disorder.

For more information about Life Unites Us and how to get involved, visit [LifeUnitesUs.com](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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