

CITY OF BALTIMORE

SHEILA DIXON, Mayor



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner
1001 E. Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Rianna Brown

PHONE: 410-396-4398

mediahealth@baltimorecity.gov

**City's Buprenorphine Initiative Earns National Recognition for Innovation;
Drug Overdose Deaths Drop in Second Quarter 2008**

BALTIMORE, MD- (November 20, 2008)- The Baltimore Buprenorphine Initiative has received national recognition for innovation through a program sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Through the Baltimore Buprenorphine Initiative, patients with heroin addiction calling Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems, Inc. for help are referred to substance abuse treatment centers. The centers provide comprehensive services, including initiation of buprenorphine therapy. In addition, case workers from Baltimore Healthcare Access, Inc. enroll the patients in health insurance and help them transfer, when ready, to private physicians for long-term treatment. The Initiative includes multiple controls to reduce inappropriate diversion of buprenorphine.

As of November 3, 2008, more than 1500 patients have received buprenorphine treatment in the Initiative, and 258 have transferred to private physicians. More than 200 city physicians have received training from the American Society of Addiction Medicine through the Initiative, and 82 have received their authorization to prescribe.

In October, the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Agency included a profile on Baltimore's effort, entitled *Community Partnerships and Provider Training Increase Capacity and Access to Long-Term Treatment for Individuals with Heroin Addiction*, in its Innovations Exchange. This is a national database of innovation, defined as "the implementation of new or altered products, services, processes, systems, organizational structures or business models as a means of improving one or more domains of health care quality." The innovations are selected by an independent editorial team, and inclusion does not imply endorsement by the Agency or HHS.

The database reports finds that "Post-implementation data suggest that [the Baltimore Buprenorphine Initiative] has enhanced access to long-term buprenorphine treatment and health insurance and increased the number of trained and certified physicians and treatment programs." The report is online at <http://www.innovations.ahrq.gov/content.aspx?id=1827>.

Today, the Health Department's Office of Epidemiology and Planning is also releasing its quarterly report on intoxication deaths associated with drugs of abuse or alcohol for the second quarter of 2008. The report, based on data provided by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the State of Maryland, finds that there were more than 20% fewer drug-of-abuse or alcohol-associated deaths in the first half of 2008 compared to the first half of 2007. The decline was noted with deaths associated with heroin, cocaine, and methadone, with the most pronounced decline for methadone. Alcohol-associated deaths increased.

Overall, the first half of 2008 has the lowest number of overdose deaths recorded since at least 1995.

The report notes, however, that these decreases may represent random fluctuations, and additional quarters of data are necessary before definitive conclusions can be drawn about 2008 trends.

The report is online at <http://www.baltimorehealth.org>.

###