

# Maryland Mobile Wellness Initiative to provide resources for drug addiction in northern Anne Arundel



Anne Arundel County's new mobile wellness vehicle is revealed at a ceremony on the grounds of the former Crownsville Hospital. (Joshua McKerrow / Capital Gazette)



By **Phil Davis**  
pdavis@capgaznews.com

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**A** new 38-foot recreational vehicle outfitted with medical personnel and addiction treatment resources is Anne Arundel's newest asset in the battle against opioid addiction.

Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford, former county executive Steve Schuh, now executive director of the state Opioid Operational Command, and several other officials launched a partnership Tuesday in Crownsville between the state and county health departments called the Maryland Mobile Wellness Initiative.

The program comes at a time when Rutherford said the state is now struggling with a new crisis: cocaine cut fentanyl, the synthetic opioid state officials have long said was the driving force behind the historic increase in heroin-related fatalities.

According to the Maryland Department of Health, 626 people died between January and September of 2018 from cocaine and fentanyl overdoses, a stark increase that started back in 2015 and has increased six-fold since.

"Heroin no longer is the major ingredient with fentanyl. It's cocaine now," Rutherford said. "So individuals (who) thought they were quote, unquote safe to use cocaine are finding that their substance of choice is now being mixed with fentanyl."

He added the mixture is “killing more people than heroin mixed with fentanyl.”

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Deputy state Health Secretary Fran Phillips said the vehicle — which will offer counseling, blood tests, naloxone and resources to connect to long-term treatment — will be stationed at the Arundel House of Hope in Glen Burnie from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays.

The former county health officer said the vehicle will be stationed at the center for homelessness programs because the northern part of the county sees the most opioid-related deaths.

As of Feb. 19, officers from the county police Northern District responded to 39 of 99 calls county for opioid overdoses, according to county police, more than any other district in the county or in Annapolis.

Phillips said she started the project about two years ago when she was still with the county health department.

“We were caught in this situation of begging, borrowing and even thinking about stealing some existing vehicles,” she said.

She thanked Robert Neall, state secretary of health and a former Anne Arundel County executive, for moving funding mechanisms at the state level to make the vehicle a reality.

Officials said the vehicle will have a certified registered nurse practitioner, registered nurse and a peer support specialist to help connect people addicted to drugs with treatment.

Inside, medical personnel will be able to run blood tests and do one-on-one consultations.

Rutherford spoke about how he hopes the vehicle removes the stigma and personal barriers to entry for people looking to get treatment.

Officials pointed to Safe Stations, an initiative that turned county firehouses and police stations into hubs for addiction treatment resources, as an example that public officials can help remove the stigma surrounding drug abuse.

Other jurisdictions and nonprofits have operated similar vehicles — [such as a nonprofit that set up outside Baltimore City’s jail](#) — but Phillips said this vehicle is also available for more opportunities outside the county.

She said that while the county Department of Health will operate and staff the vehicle, she said the state is open to having it run by other county health departments in other jurisdictions.

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