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10-1-2018

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Public Affairs, Roger Williams University

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Recommended Citation

Public Affairs, Roger Williams University, "R.I. State Police Unveil Innovative Opioid Outreach Initiative at RWU" (2018). *Featured News Story*. 206.

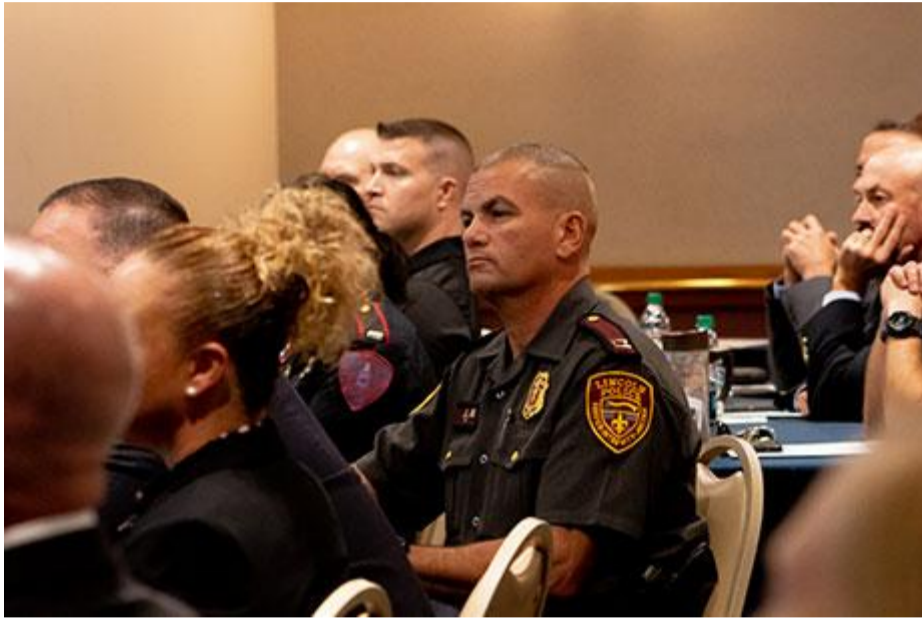
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R.I. State Police Unveil Innovative Opioid Outreach Initiative at RWU

Governor Raimondo, Chris Herren and State Police Col. Assumpico '90 talk about combating public health crisis



The Rhode Island State Police unveiled The HOPE (Heroin-Opioid Prevention Effort) Initiative during a one-day conference hosted by Roger Williams University's School of Justice Studies at the Justice System Training & Research Institute.

October 1, 2018 | Public Affairs

BRISTOL, R.I. – With 323 overdose deaths in 2017, Rhode Island is at the epicenter of the opioid crisis.

To combat that crisis, Gov. Gina M. Raimondo and Col. Ann C. Assumpico, the Rhode Island State Police superintendent and a 1990 RWU graduate, unveiled The HOPE (Heroin-Opioid Prevention Effort) Initiative on Monday, Oct. 1, during a one-day conference hosted by Roger Williams University's School of Justice Studies at the Justice System Training & Research Institute.

The HOPE Initiative is the first statewide program that engages law enforcement personnel in a proactive outreach strategy to combat the opioid overdose epidemic. It will bring together substance use professionals and members of law enforcement with the mission of reaching out to those who are at risk of overdosing and encouraging them to be assessed and treated.



Gov. Raimondo (front) and Col. Assumpico announce the initiative.

"Since I've been governor, this issue of the overdose crisis is definitely the one that keeps me up at night the most," Raimondo said. "It is by far our greatest public health crisis."

"The HOPE Initiative empowers police officers across the state to take a powerful, proactive approach to combatting the opioid epidemic," Assumpico said. "Instead of waiting for the next overdose to happen, we will be out there helping people get the treatment they need to save their lives."

The program kicked off with a daylong training program for more than 80 state and local law enforcement officers who will be participating in the initiative. They will be partnering with clinicians and recovery coaches in their communities to reach out to individuals considered to be at-risk for an opioid overdose to encourage them to seek help.

RWU Interim President Andy Workman welcomed the participants to the conference, which took place at RWU's Baypoint Conference Center.

"This is exactly aligned with the purpose of Roger Williams University," Workman said. "Our purpose is to serve society through engaged teaching and learning. Our goal is to gather the various departments at the University – whether it be the School of Justice Studies, the School of Law, the Department of Public Health – to address the key issues that face our state. And I can't think of anything more important than addressing the opioid crisis, as we are here today."

Raimondo, who spoke during the training session, said, "The HOPE initiative is a unique, first-in-the-nation collaborative partnership among state agencies that will enable law enforcement and clinicians to work together in the community and connect people to lifesaving treatment. This is exactly the kind of innovative approach Rhode Island needs to tackle the opioid crisis. There's never any shame in seeking help. Recovery is possible for everyone."

The HOPE Initiative will be coordinated by the Rhode Island State Police, in partnership with the Governor's Task Force on Opioid Prevention and Intervention, the Department of Health, the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. The program will be funded through state and federal grants.

"We've learned we can't arrest our way out of this problem," said Tom Coderre, senior policy adviser to Gov. Raimondo and co-chair of the Governor's Overdose Prevention and Intervention Task Force. "This new program will utilize the right combination of law enforcement, clinical and lived experience we believe will help engage more people to get the help they need to find and sustain recovery for the long term."

The event included a powerful speech about addiction by Chris Herren, a Fall River native and former Boston Celtics basketball player who recently celebrated 10 years of sobriety and shares his story nationwide with the goal of reaching one person and making a difference in their life. He founded the Herren Project in 2011 to help increase awareness of the disease of addiction and provide recovery navigation and family support resources to all those affected by substance use disorder.

"Men and women like you saved my life," Herren told a room filled with law enforcement officers. "So I can't thank you enough. The HOPE Initiative will save lives and it will reconnect families."

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