



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Continuing Our Fight Against Heroin

PATTY RITCHIE August 18, 2014

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

If you have a loved one who is struggling with addiction, you know that their use of substances like heroin can be both frightening and heartbreaking. Here in New York State, the number of deaths from heroin overdose has doubled. In the Central and Northern New York, the number of users seeking treatment for heroin and opioid abuse has increased 300 percent (over 400 percent in Oswego County) over 10 years.

That's why I've been working alongside my colleagues, local law enforcement officials and community members to stop the spread of heroin and prevent future tragedies related to use of the drug. Here's a look at what we have accomplished so far:

***Expanding insurance coverage to treat addiction:*** In June, legislation I sponsored to expand insurance coverage for treating heroin addiction was signed into law. Access to treatment was one of the major issues identified at my recent heroin and opioid addiction forum and this measure was part of an 11 bill package aimed at preventing and combating abuse.

***Funding to stop drug traffickers:*** Members of the St. Lawrence County Task Force who were present at my heroin and opioid addiction forum expressed a need for more resources to crack down on major dealers. Just recently I announced \$50,000 to help them expand their efforts in the fight against the heroin epidemic.

***Stopping prescription drug abuse:*** Prescription drugs, like painkillers and opioids often act as gateway drugs for heroin. Through my recent "Shed the Meds" events, more than 200 pounds of expired and unwanted prescription pills have been safely and responsibly disposed of. For more information on upcoming "Shed the Meds" events, please visit my website, [www.ritchie.nysenate.gov](http://www.ritchie.nysenate.gov).

***Educating children on the dangers of drug abuse:*** Last month, I secured \$40,000 to restore anti-drug abuse counseling and education programs to all school districts in Oswego County. Recent budget cuts have eliminated anti-drug counseling in many local schools and the lack of programs, especially for young people, was one of the top issues identified at my recent forum.

It goes without saying that heroin abuse is a very serious problem not only in our region, but also across our state and our country. The good news is that we're making strides—and by working together we can

stop the spread of this deadly drug that has the power to destroy lives. If you would like more information on the above, as well as other ways I'm working to make our communities safer, please visit my website.