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## Safe Homes Coalition Launches Program in Greater Boston

*The Greater Boston Association of REALTORS® , Learn to Cope, and Millennium Health partner to reduce preventable prescription medication deaths*

BOSTON – At a press conference held at the Massachusetts State House today, the Safe Homes Coalition announced a new program in Greater Boston aimed at reducing overdose deaths associated with the misuse and abuse of prescription medications. The Safe Homes Coalition leads a unique partnership comprised of the Greater Boston Association of REALTORS® (a division of the Greater Boston Real Estate Board), Learn to Cope, and Millennium Health. The Coalition also includes organizations representing: the medical, dental and health care communities; law enforcement and public safety; recovery advocates; youth athletics; and other community partnerships. Elected officials, including Governor Charlie Baker, attended the event.

“We need to prevent prescription medications from getting into the hands of people who shouldn’t have them, especially those most vulnerable – our children. The Safe Homes Coalition educates and empowers people to understand how to safely secure and dispose of unused or unwanted medications,” said **Gregory A. Stein, Safe Homes Coalition Executive Director**. “The Safe Homes Coalition brings together organizations throughout the Commonwealth to help eradicate this epidemic.”

“Across the Commonwealth, we've seen instances of opioid and prescription drug abuse rise to epidemic levels, requiring assistance from a broad range of ideas and stakeholders rather than one-size-fits-all solutions,” said **Governor Baker**. “The attention and work the medical community, law enforcement, public health officials and officeholders are bringing to the table is an essential step toward addressing this issue, and we must consider creative and practical solutions like that proposed by the Safe Homes Coalition to impact change.”

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“Massachusetts is facing an unprecedented public health crisis, and a multi-pronged approach is crucial in addressing this epidemic. The Safe Homes Coalition is a welcome partner in raising awareness about the risks for misuse, abuse, and addiction of prescription painkillers,” said **Attorney General Maura Healey**. “By educating our families and communities about how to safely store and properly dispose of prescription medications, we are taking preventative steps to protect everyone from the abuse of prescription painkillers and the very real impact of substance use disorder.”

“We see instances of prescription drug addiction across every neighborhood in Boston, regardless of demographic or socioeconomic class, and so frequently, the most addictive prescription drugs become a gateway to opioids,” said **Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh**. “The Safe Homes Coalition is a piece of the puzzle, and if we can continue to identify the missing pieces to the puzzle, we can stem this epidemic that is causing many Boston families to lose the ones they love.”

Prescription medicines are important and can be life-saving when used as prescribed. Alarmingly, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, more than 70% of medications that are used for non-medical purposes come from the medicine cabinets of our friends and family – less than 4% come from a drug dealer. And children are particularly vulnerable, as 90% of addictions start in the teenage years. The Partnership for Drug Free Kids reports, one in six teens has used a prescription drug not prescribed to them in order to get high or change their mood and prescription drugs are now the most commonly abused drugs among 12 and 13 year olds.

Preventing access to prescription drugs is key to addressing the public health epidemic this nation is facing. The Safe Homes Coalition’s Keep Kids Safe Program provides education and awareness around this issue and distributes reusable, re-sealable bags to real estate professionals for their clients to use to secure prescription medications while their homes are being shown to potential buyers. This program educates the public about the need to safeguard their prescription medications, as they would any other valuables, prior to opening their homes to potential buyers or others.

“They call this ‘Generation Rx.’ I’ve been doing this for many years and I’ve heard so many stories about how people can become victims without even realizing that their medications can be accessed in these open houses,” said **Joanne Peterson, Founder of Learn to Cope**. “Prescription drug addiction reaches all demographics, and the face of drug addiction has changed – this could be a man in a business suit or a woman in nurse’s attire. Any opportunity we have to intervene and stop medications from getting into the hands of the wrong people is a welcome solution, and I love the mission of the Safe Homes Coalition.”

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“As advocates for our communities, REALTORS® have a long history of involvement in programs designed to improve the lives of local residents. It’s also part of our members’ training and ethical duty to protect the welfare and best interests of their clients,” said **David McCarthy, broker-owner of Keller Williams Realty Boston Metro and President of the Greater Boston Association of Realtors®**, a division of the Greater Boston Real Estate Board. “Our association is excited to be partners in this initiative to help reduce opportunities for misuse and abuse of prescriptions medications, and we wholeheartedly support the Coalition’s goal of creating safer homes and communities for our children.”

The Safe Homes Coalition received commendation by the California State Senate in 2014 for its work in San Diego, distributing more than 10,000 bags and educating the public through presentations at community events. Greater Boston is the second location for Keep Kids Safe and the Coalition plans to distribute another 10,000 bags, participate in educational events throughout the region, and release other multimedia educational materials.

To learn more about the Greater Boston Keep Kids Safe program, to partner with us, to request a speaker for an educational program in your community, to obtain Keep Kids Safe bags, or to donate, visit <http://makeitasafefhome.org/boston>.

#### **ADDITIONAL QUOTES**

“Education and awareness around the dangers of medication misuse and abuse has been a cornerstone of Millennium Health’s outreach efforts since our founding in 2007,” said **Nikhil Nayak, Chief Marketing Officer of Millennium Health**. “This unique Coalition, building on successes in San Diego, provides a unique opportunity to focus on one community that has been particularly hard hit, providing a simple solution to address this complex public health crisis our nation faces.”

“At the Gavin Foundation, we know that a multifaceted approach is absolutely necessary when addressing substance abuse,” said **John McGahan, President & CEO of the Gavin Foundation**. “We’ve seen instances of prescription drug abuse grow at an alarming rate, and we attribute that – in part – to access to these medications. We need creative programs like the Safe Homes Coalition to explore ways to cut off these access points.”

“BCBSMA has collaborated with the health care community to limit inappropriate access to dangerous prescription medications prone to abuse. But, to be clear, we are seeing a pervasive problem that no single industry can solve alone,” said **Michael Caljouw, Vice President of State Government and Regulatory Affairs at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts**. “The program put forth by the Safe Homes Coalition is a practical, common-sense first step to limit access at one entry point. Combined with additional tools, the Commonwealth will begin to make real strides in addressing this epidemic. We pledge to work tirelessly with all stakeholders for that essential goal.”

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“Health plans, and the broader healthcare community, play an important role in ensuring that patients who need medication maintain access. However, due to the potential some of these medications have to be misused or abused, it is also our responsibility to support efforts such as the Safe Homes Coalition,” said **Jay Gonzalez, President & CEO of CeltiCare Health**. “We recognize that Safe Homes uses this unique channel as a means of educating patients about their role in securing medications and reducing inappropriate access. CeltiCare Health is proud to join with so many others in the healthcare community to support the Safe Homes Coalition’s Keep Kids Safe educational program.”

## **PARTNERS**

Additional coalition partners include public safety officials, public health experts, recovery advocates, the medical community, elected officials, and others.

- **Leadership Partners**
  - Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
  - Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey
  - Massachusetts Medical Society
  - Gavin Foundation
  - Celticare Health
- **Supporting Partners**
  - Partnership for Drug-Free Kids
  - Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association
  - Association for Behavioral Healthcare
  - Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery
  - Massachusetts Association of Health Plans
  - Tufts Health Plan
  - Harvard Pilgrim HealthCare
  - Massachusetts Dental Society
  - Massachusetts Sheriffs Association
- **Additional Supporters**
  - Governor Charlie Baker
  - Mayor Martin J. Walsh
  - Attorney General Maura Healey
  - Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan
  - Middlesex Sheriff Peter Koutoujian
  - Suffolk Sheriff Steve Tompkins
  - Senator Jennifer Flanagan
  - Senator John Keenan
  - Representative Dan Cullinane
  - Representative Mark Cusack
  - Representative Liz Malia