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Gary De Carolis, Executive Director
Vermont Recovery Network d/b/a Recovery Partners of Vermont
802.310.5255
gary@vtrecoverynetwork.org

We are Losing the Opioid Overdose Death Battle

Burlington, VT –

Two events in the past week should send alarms throughout Vermont in its battle to end opioid related overdose deaths in Vermont. The Vermont Department of Corrections has decided to quickly close all sober houses in Vermont, eliminating the number of beds for people leaving a correctional center by scores. They cited “violations” as their reason to end this vital program for people early in their recovery from a substance use disorder. The Department of Corrections’ solution to ending its contract with the Phoenix House is to adopt a scattered site model. At the same time this shift in practice is happening, Vermont was recently cited by the federal Center for Disease Control as having the highest percentage increase (69.9%) in overdose deaths in the United States.

Vermont Recovery Network Executive Director Gary De Carolis responded to these events: “The sober houses of the Phoenix House provided comprehensive support to people with a substance use disorder as they left the correctional system. These homes partnered closely with recovery centers across Vermont that gave participants access to recovery coaching, volunteer opportunities, employment referrals, and a host of other recovery supports. In closing those sober houses, the DOC has opted to find apartments (which we have few of in this state) for recently released people. Individual living creates isolation, which is particularly harmful to those who are new to recovery. We should be doing more for those battling a substance use disorder, not less-- statistics from the federal Center for Disease Control rank Vermont as the state with the highest increase in overdose deaths in the United States. This sad statistic drives home the point that we are losing our battle to save Vermonters who have a substance use disorder.” Every Vermonter needs to be part of the solution, and every state agency that is touched by this epidemic needs to be listening to those who toil in this work every day, including recovery centers, treatment programs, and the sober housing providers. Only together do we have a chance to beat this horrible epidemic and ensure Vermonters both survive and thrive.”

The Vermont Recovery Network d/b/a Recovery Partners of Vermont is dedicated to supporting its member recovery centers in providing services and supports to all those who are affected by a substance use disorder. To learn more, please visit the website at: www.vtrecoverynetwork.org.