



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
November 2, 2016

**CONTACT:**  
Mike Swain  
(231) 489-4275  
m.swain@nwhealth.org



**HEALTH**  
**DEPARTMENT**  
of Northwest Michigan

[www.nwhealth.org](http://www.nwhealth.org)

## **Health Department Hosts Forum in Antrim County on Drug Trends**

CENTRAL LAKE, Mich. – Antrim County parents and school officials gathered in Central Lake on Thursday, October 27<sup>th</sup> to hear from local experts on drug trends impacting area teens. The forum, sponsored by SAFE in Northern Michigan, featured a panel of experts that covered the increased potency of drugs, treatment options, new legislation that protects those who report overdoses and the harm that improper drug disposal has on area waterways.

Robin Sommer, of Central Lake, lost her son to an opioid overdose in 2015. She asked attendees for their help in “stopping the silence and starting a conversation.” Sommer also informed attendees of Michigan’s Full 911 Good Samaritan Law. The new law exempts Michiganders of all ages from prosecution of drug-related charges when they are seeking medical aid for someone experiencing an overdose. Michigan State Police Trooper Corey Hebner warned attendees of the prevalence of opioids, including prescription drugs and heroin, in Michigan. In 2014, Hebner said, 1,745 drug overdose deaths occurred in Michigan. The Michigan State Police in Gaylord have started an “angel program,” a diversion program that helps individuals obtain treatment for addiction.

Jennifer McKay, Policy Director at the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, said the improper disposal of drugs, including over-the-counter and prescription drugs in the form of liquids, patches, or pills, causes changes in waterways that can have negative effects on aquatic wildlife. Residents and visitors of Northern Michigan can safely dispose of prescription and over-the-counter drugs in drop-off boxes located across the region. A list of locations can be found at [www.pillsinthepod.com](http://www.pillsinthepod.com).

Treatment experts Scott Kelly of Bay Area Substance Education Services and Randy Koch of Harbor Hall also presented on substance abuse treatment options. Kelly presented data showing improvements over the last 40 years that have included decreased use of alcohol and tobacco among high school students. However, Kelly warned, students’ perceived risk of harm has declined which can lead to an increase in drug use as teens view drugs as less dangerous, risky and harmful. Kelly gave several tips to parents, including close monitoring, modeling healthy behaviors and setting realistic and attainable expectations.

Randy Koch shared insights regarding expanded treatment services throughout Michigan including collaborations with the justice system such as drug and alcohol treatment courts. Koch noted that increasing acceptance of addiction as a medical disorder has resulted in expanded treatment options citing the use of medication assisted treatments for opioid addiction which are improving client success rates. Koch encouraged increasing discussions within our communities to broaden understanding and decrease stigma surrounding this disease.

SAFE in Northern Michigan works to prevent youth substance use and increase community awareness. For more information on substance use programs in Northwest Michigan, call the Health Department at (231) 347-5813. The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties.