



Hennepin County  
Medical Center

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **UCare and Hennepin County team up to act on opioid crisis**

### ***Partnership creates innovative HCMC ER treatment and withdrawal management initiatives for at-risk populations***

MINNEAPOLIS, Jan. 31, 2018 – Last year, 162 people died of opioid overdose in Hennepin County, according to Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek. That record-high number represents a nearly twofold increase since 2015; the Sheriff's Office expects that the toll will continue to increase.

A grant from UCare will enable Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC) to embed licensed drug and alcohol counselors in the Emergency Department to help assess UCare members for treatment with a highly effective addiction medication, and to connect these patients to community providers for ongoing medication treatment.

These initiatives will benefit the community by providing cost-effective and research-based early medical response and long-term social support services to help opioid users conquer their addictions.

The [HCMC Emergency Department](#) treats more than 470 people each year who have identified opioid-related conditions, the majority who are addicted to opioids. HCMC and UCare have identified the Emergency Department as a critical opportunity for patients to begin immediate treatment with the medication buprenorphine.

“Studies have shown that pairing medication for opioid-use disorder in the Emergency Department with facilitated linkage to ongoing community care is more effective in keeping opioid users in sustained treatment over time,” said Gavin Bart, MD, director of Addiction Medicine at HCMC. “This program will have a profound impact on county priorities and community needs.”

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UCare is also funding additional withdrawal management services for UCare members who seek care from Hennepin County's detoxification and withdrawal management services.

"Addiction takes a terrible toll across our county," said Hennepin County Chair Jan Callison. "We know that there are keys to the root causes and to effective treatments in the social determinants of health – wellness, neighborhood, education, economic stability and the social environment – and our hope is that working with UCare on holistic medical and social strategies will bring us closer to getting people the help they so desperately need."

These Hennepin County initiatives create the opportunity to intervene early and help people stay opioid-free.

"We recognize the urgency in Hennepin County to take immediate action to combat opioid use in the short- and long-term," said Ghita Worcester, UCare's Senior Vice President of Public Affairs and Chief Marketing Officer. "These innovative approaches will ensure that people who are struggling with addiction receive care in the right dosage for the appropriate length of time. The impact will be improved health, reduced costs, engaged community members and less stigma associated with addiction within our communities."

### About UCare

UCare ([www.ucare.org](http://www.ucare.org)) is an independent, not-for-profit health plan that provides health care and administrative services to more than 380,000 Minnesotans. UCare partners with health care providers, counties, and community organizations to create and deliver:

- National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA)-[accredited plans](#) for Minnesotans shopping on MNsure.
- [Plans](#) for adults with disabilities.
- [Medicare plans](#) with an "Excellent" NCQA rating, and a [partnership](#) with Essentia Health.
- [Programs for older Minnesotans with Medical Assistance, or with Medicare.](#)
- Income-based [Medicaid](#) and [MinnesotaCare](#) coverage.

UCare addresses health care disparities and care access issues through a broad array of community initiatives. The health plan has received Top Workplaces honors from the Star Tribune for eight consecutive years since the rankings began in 2010.