The Brutal Realities of Denver's Opioid Crisis

The city's Harm Reduction Action Center is collaborating with local journalists for a four-part in-depth series about addiction in Colorado.

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Ever wonder what it's like to combat opioid addiction and hepatitis C virus (HCV) on the ground? This week, Westword Magazine in collaboration with Denver's Harm Reduction Action Center (HRAC) published a four-part in-depth series about battling addiction in Colorado. The series paints a devastating multifaceted picture of the crisis and proposes a number of solutions to help address it.

Each article — "The Four Main Reasons People in Denver Overdose on Heroin," "Denver Homeless Shoot Meth in Winter So They Won't Freeze to Death," "Every Bathroom In Our Community Will Continue to Be an Injection Site" and "Heroin and Other Drug Use in Denver: The Brutal Numbers" — tackles a different angle of the city and state's complex story. The collaboration between journalist Michael Roberts and Harm Reduction Action Center executive director Lisa Raville seeks to spark local action to fight the epidemic.

In the first article, harm reduction advocates discuss the daily habits of local heroin users, the quality of the drugs they're injecting and the overdose risks many drug users are facing.

The second article talks about the rise in injection meth and heroin users accessing local harm reduction facilities and the troubling stories around homelessness and addiction they've been telling community health workers on the front line of the crisis.

The third article makes the case for establishing supervised injection facilities in Denver as a way of mitigating overdose risk in public libraries and bathrooms. The article also speaks of the political hurdles that addiction and hepatitis prevention workers face when trying to get lifesaving legislation passed.

The final article in the series lays down the scope of the state's addiction crisis — which mirrors that of the nation at large in that it affects white suburban or rural young adults.

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