



Pennsylvania
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Shapiro Administration's Campaign to End Substance Use Disorder Stigma Expands to Major Construction Industry Partner, Ensures Workforce Hit Hard by Opioid Epidemic Feels Comfortable Asking for Help



CDC study shows construction workers prescribed opioids for pain had a higher risk for long-term opioid use and for developing opioid use disorder.

*The **Life Unites Us** campaign uses social media platforms to share stories of Pennsylvanians living in recovery from substance use disorders – reaching millions statewide, reducing stigma associated with SUD.*

Middletown, PA - Today, the **Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP)** announced the Keystone Contractors Association (KCA) is joining the **Shapiro Administration's** statewide network of organizations working to end substance use disorder (SUD) stigma through a DDAP-funded campaign called [Life Unites Us](#).

Life Unites Us is the Administration's people-forward, research-driven initiative that uses social media to spread stories of individuals in recovery, their family members, and allies who support those with SUD. It is designed to reinforce and normalize that recovery is not only possible but supported by individuals, businesses, and organizations across the state.

"Reducing the stigma associated with the disease of addiction is at the crux of DDAP's work, and that work requires us to meet people where they live and work," said **DDAP Deputy Secretary Sarah Boateng**. "By adding an industry partner that plays a large role in building our Commonwealth while also facing unique challenges associated with opioid use disorder, we are expanding the reach of the Shapiro Administration's campaign into an industry where trusted voices matter and a supportive environment makes a difference."

Representing one of Pennsylvania's largest employment sectors, KCA is a membership organization of about 100 construction companies including general contractors, construction managers, specialty contractors, roofers, masons, and others with a dedication to improving the construction industry by focusing on safety, education, and training.

Additionally, since **Governor Josh Shapiro** took office, KCA has stocked active Pennsylvania construction job sites with hundreds of doses of the overdose reversal medication naloxone to help prevent overdoses. The naloxone at the sites is supplied through DDAP's [Overdose Prevention Program](#) and distributed by KCA.

Commitment to Helping the Construction Industry

Construction professionals experience unique workplace challenges that increase the need to have access to SUD and mental health resources. A study by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) showed that construction workers prescribed opioids for pain had a higher risk for long-term opioid use and for developing opioid use disorder (OUD); annually, 15 percent of workers who were prescribed opioids became long-term users; and, long-term users were nearly 10 times as likely to develop OUD.

"At the Keystone Contractors Association, we feel it is our responsibility to provide resources and education to construction employers to promote safer pain management, reduce stigma, equip job sites with naloxone, and foster recovery friendly job sites – ultimately saving lives in an industry that has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic," said **Jon O'Brien, KCA Executive Director**.

Joining DDAP to make this announcement were two individuals in recovery who worked in Philadelphia's construction industry during their times of active substance use. Now in recovery, both are sharing their lived experiences to help others by [participating in Life Unites Us](#) through social media testimonials as well as working full time in the SUD field.

"I've taken my experience with substance use disorder and turned it into an opportunity to help others find their pathway to recovery by sharing my struggles, particularly during my time in the

building trades,” said **Randy Winder, University of Pennsylvania Center for Addiction Medicine and Policy Substance Use Navigator**. “Initiatives like Life Unites Us play a huge part of reducing stigma that goes along with substance use disorder in the construction industry by creating an outlet for me and others to speak out and remind anyone who may be struggling that they’re not alone.”

“I came from a place of losing everything when I was an ironworker and suffering from substance use disorder – my tools, my truck – everything,” said **Brad Meck, University of Pennsylvania Center for Addiction Medicine and Policy Clinical Research Coordinator**. “I’m proud today to say that I am a certified recovery specialist helping others who are coming from very similar situations as mine and the Life Unites Us campaign allows me to spread the message to others that help is available and recovery is possible.”

Since the start of the Shapiro Administration, **State Senator John I. Kane**, who worked in the construction trades and is also an individual in recovery from SUD, has led the effort to recognize the third week of July as Construction Opioid Awareness Week in Pennsylvania. His [resolution](#) encourages the construction industry in the Commonwealth to continue promoting awareness of the dangers of opioids and prescription drug misuse, with special emphasis during the summer months when construction activity is at its peak.

“I’ve walked that road myself, and I know recovery is possible when people are met with compassion instead of stigma,” said **Senator Kane**. “Construction Opioid Awareness Week is a way to remind workers and families that help is available, recovery is real, and no one should have to suffer in silence. I’m proud to support the Life Unites Us campaign and the Keystone Contractors Association’s commitment to making our workplaces safer, healthier, and more supportive for everyone.”

Life Unites Us is Changing Minds and Attitudes

Life Unites Us is a collaboration between DDAP, Penn State Harrisburg’s [Douglas W. Pollock Center for Addiction Outreach and Research](#), and national public health organizations.

During the fifth year of the campaign, Pennsylvanians saw stigma reduction messages through social media more than **10 million** times, reaching over **three million** individuals statewide.

A recent survey of Pennsylvanians who have been exposed to the campaign since its inception shows that Life Unites Us:

- Increased their awareness of opioid OUD stigma;
- Helped them feel more prepared to talk with others about OUD stigma;
- Increased their willingness to obtain and provide naloxone; and,
- Helped to change attitudes about using medications to effectively treat OUD.

“The success of Life Unites Us demonstrates the power of bringing together public health leaders, community organizations, and people with lived experience to advance recovery and reduce stigma,” said **Director of Penn State’s Douglas W. Pollock Center for Addiction Outreach and Research Dr. Weston Kensinger**. “The leadership of Governor Shapiro and DDAP has enabled this campaign to reach millions of Pennsylvanians and build a network of hundreds of partner organizations committed to advancing recovery and reducing stigma. Welcoming the Keystone Contractors Association into that network is an important milestone that will help us extend these messages into workplaces, engage new audiences, and further

our shared goal of ensuring that every Pennsylvanian understands that recovery is possible and deserves support.”

KCA joins **220 other organizations** partnering with Life Unites Us. Partner organizations include county drug and alcohol offices, SUD treatment providers, recovery-based service providers, recovery houses, and higher education institutions. As trusted voices, Life Unites Us partners play an important role in spreading educational messages about SUD and guiding the campaign’s work by acting as bridges to their community.

In addition to recording, posting, and distributing messages of lived experience and hope, Life Unites Us partners serve as subject matter experts for webinars and technical assistance offerings and are featured in various campaign publications.

Organizations interested in joining the growing network of Life Unites Us partners can do so through the [sign-up link](#) on the campaign’s website.

For more information about Life Unites Us and how to get involved, visit [LifeUnitesUs.com](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [X](#).

EDITORS: Photos and video of the event are available through [PA Cast](#).

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