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LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS

Secretary Gary Westcott



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Annual Ceremony Culminates National Recovery Month

Observance to raise awareness about mental health and substance use disorders

Baton Rouge, LA - Leadership and staff of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections will end National Recovery Month with a fifth annual ceremony that recognizes the importance of supporting individuals in their journey toward sobriety and wellness. The event is set for Tuesday, September 30 at 10 a.m. in the Memorial Circle at the Department's Baton Rouge Headquarters.

The national observance, which started in 1989, is held every September to promote and support new evidence-based treatment and recovery practices for mental health and substance use disorders. The goal of the month-long initiative is to spread awareness and educate the public that recovery, in all of its form, is possible utilizing the most appropriate treatments available. This year's national theme, Recovery is REAL, which stands for Restoring Every Aspect of Life highlights that recovery is an achievable journey of healing and rebuilding a life that brings joy.

"Addiction is a disease but a treatable medical condition and during Recovery Month this is an opportunity for the Department to highlight the ongoing efforts to provide treatment, education, and support for individuals impacted by substance use and mental health disorders," said Shelly Edgerton, Chief Mental Health Officer. "These services play a vital role in fostering rehabilitation and long-term success."

Prevalent addictions by specific substance disorders include opioids, pain relievers, prescription stimulants, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl.

"I'm extremely proud of the work that my colleagues and I are undertaking on behalf of the Department alongside community partners, other state agencies, providers as well as institutions of higher learning to address mental health and addiction," added Edgerton. "Collaboratively we're working to bring about hope, change, strengthening the recovery community, and accessible services for those who need treatment."

According to the 2023 United States National Survey on Drug Use and Health data, it is estimated that 48.5 million Americans age 12 and older experienced a substance use disorder in the past year. This number represents alcohol use disorder, drug use disorders and individuals with both disorders combined.

Currently, Louisiana has an incarcerated population of more than 14,000 inmates in state correctional facilities and approximately 15,537 inmates housed in local jails. As of January 2025, inmates diagnosed with a substance use disorder represent approximately 73% of the prison population in the Department's custody who meet the diagnostic criteria for drug dependence or abuse.

"The Department is continuing to make inroads to assist individuals who are incarcerated who suffer from the disease of addiction have access to evidence-based treatments while in custody as well as access to continued care upon re-entry into the community," said Gary Westcott, secretary Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. "Through comprehensive treatment and support programs, the Department remains committed to empowering our employees along with the population we serve to embrace healthier futures."

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