

# Calvin Ball

for

**HOWARD COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

## **Addressing our Addiction Crisis**

An epidemic is claiming lives across the nation, and Howard County is not immune. Addiction to opioids - including prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl - is a serious crisis that affects public health and impacts families in every community.

At least 72 people in Howard County died last year due to opioid-related overdoses (23 from heroin, 13 from prescriptions opioids, and 36 from fentanyl according to a 2018 Baltimore Business Journal [article](#)). Unfortunately, the real toll is even greater, as these numbers fail to count our fellow residents who died outside of Howard County.

Many more suffered non-fatal overdoses or saw their lives deeply affected by addiction. Drug addiction and the challenges surrounding it are not new. However, the severity and persistence of this crisis demand that we take bold action. We need to be working holistically and comprehensively in developing programs to address the suffering of our neighbors.

Meaningful progress in combatting drug addiction is long overdue.

## **Our Vision: No More Silence, No More Shame**

I believe that a crucial first step in ending the opioid epidemic is to have an open and honest conversation as a community. Our neighbors in crisis need to feel comfortable seeking help. We must also empower their friends and family to speak up. If we allow shame and stigma to breed silence, we risk waiting until it is too late.

We need to always demonstrate our humanity and help remind our neighbors and loved ones who fall victim to this epidemic that there is a way back. We can make meaningful change with the understanding that addiction is a disease that requires medically proven treatment platforms.

We also need to keep our community informed of the facts about addiction, homelessness, and mental health. These issues are institutionally related and must be

addressed comprehensively. Our collective efforts can help reduce the stigma and create a better community support network for all.

As your Howard County Executive, I would take several steps to help those in need:

### **Improve Awareness of Addiction**

Prevention of addiction starts with education. Howard County needs to strengthen partnerships with our schools and our community college to improve educational presentations for our children, beginning in middle school and continuing through high school and college. After school workshops should also be available to every parent. We can use the educational resources that our neighboring counties have already developed.

Improving awareness also means taking a big picture view of the issue. We must view addiction and homelessness, as well as mental health challenges, through the lenses of illness instead of a criminal activity. Being locked away in a detention center will not treat the problem, will harm those in need, and will ultimately cost our taxpayers more money.

We should also be educating patients about the proper use and storage of their medication. More than 70% of people using opioid painkillers for non-medical reasons get them from family or friends. Patients who are prescribed opioids need to know that misuse of the medication can be illegal, extremely harmful, and even deadly.

### **Build Comprehensive Recovery Centers**

Access to mental, physical, and dental health is a critical step on the path to recovery. We need to bring to Howard County affordable, quality, inpatient detox and treatment centers to ensure treatment is immediately available, on demand.

Just as our emergency rooms offer around the clock care, detox centers should be available 24/7 to those who are ready to stop using, especially after overdosing. Access to mental, physical, and dental health is a critical step on the path to recovery. The next step on that journey is to connect these sources of care. If we truly want to help every one of our neighbors in need, we must bring all of our social service providers together to create a solution that is comprehensive, affordable, and patient-focused.

It is not enough to put social service providers in the same office park. We must break down the invisible walls between them by creating truly connected, one-stop centers for recovery. It will take a partnership with Howard County General Hospital, Howard Community College, Howard County Public Schools, our Police and Fire departments, the Health Department, Shepard Pratt, HopeWorks, Grassroots, the Horizon Foundation,

Bridges to Housing Stability, Helping Up Mission, and many others to bring this vision to life.

I am confident we can achieve it.

With the broad partnership outlined above, we could create centers with a residential healing and recovery program tailored to individual patients. In addition to addiction treatment, they would provide primary medical care, dental care, mental health counseling, and health education. The final component would be an education and workforce center where residents could receive, resume writing skills, job training, placement services, college preparation, tutoring, guidance on managing personal finances, and use of a computer learning lab.

These centers would give us, under one roof, a patient-centered, comprehensive approach to helping some of our most vulnerable residents heal. We would also provide affordable, sober living housing for both men and women, including women with children, who are starting the difficult journey to sobriety. We would give them a suite of transitional services, from housing to health care, to life management skills, to ensure they remain in a nurturing environment throughout the path to full recovery.

### **Increase Naloxone Training and Distribution**

As we work on long-term solutions to fighting this epidemic, we must also use all the tools at our disposal to save lives today. Naloxone is a prescription medication that safely and effectively reverses an opioid overdose. It does not cause addiction and is a proven, life-saving tool in fighting opioids. Naloxone is a key resource that will be combined with peer counseling, immediate access to detox and treatment, and all our other efforts in the fight against addiction. That is why we should expand training and distribution of Naloxone in Howard County communities, not just government buildings.

### **Expand Drug Take Back and Drop-off Availability**

In order to prevent abuse of prescription drugs, we must make it easier to get unused medication out of the community. These unused or expired medications are a public health issue, leading to potential poisoning, misuse, and overdose. If we allow for the safe drop off of these substances, we protect the environment and save lives. We should expand the availability of drug take back times and locations to make Howard County safer.

### **Research Better Pain Management Systems**

Medical professionals are often forced to balance the risks of opioid use with the chronic pain of their patients. If we invest in research and practice of more comprehensive

treatment, we can reduce our dependence on opioids. We will work with medical professionals, including those at Johns Hopkins and University of Maryland, Baltimore, as well as patient advocacy groups to develop community-based solutions to chronic pain and opioid dependence, with the goal of destigmatizing these issues. We will work toward a future where patients have better options to manage their pain outside of opioid use.

### **A Way Forward**

Howard County is a community full of compassionate, caring residents, yet many of our neighbors are struggling with challenges they cannot communicate and that feel so insurmountable, many others cannot even comprehend.

With a bold vision and comprehensive partnership, we *can* create a coordinated program of support, healing and recovery that is unmatched anywhere.

We owe it to ourselves, and to each other, to make this vision of healing a reality.