IMLA MID-YEAR SEMINAR









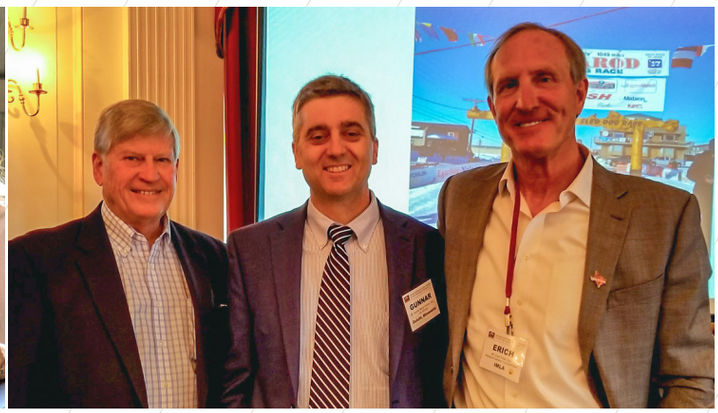




IMLA's Mid-Year Seminar was again hosted at Washington DC's iconic Omni Shoreham Hotel over four days of spectacular spring weather. Thanks again to our speakers, our sponsors, our Amicus winners—and above all, our members—for helping to make our event such a great success!

























Opioid Epidemic Cont'd from page 15

never a large coal producer, the county was tied to the coal industry as a major transportation (rail) hub for southern West Virginia's coalfields. As coal production decreased over the years Mercer County's economy was impacted significantly. High unemployment and poverty rates, coupled with significant substance abuse had a crippling effect on the county and its prospects.

Recognizing the importance of providing the community with a positive sense of direction, Mercer County officials decided to reinstitute the defunct planning commission in addition to updating the community's comprehensive plan–which had not been updated since the late 1990s. County officials called on the Land Use Clinic to assist in the process.

County officials were particularly interested in the safety of its citizens and in supporting community members needing assistance due to substance abuse. Quickly recognizing that there was no "silver bullet" solution to the opioid crisis, the planning commission suggested a multifaceted, cross-jurisdictional approach in its draft comprehensive plan. The Mercer County comprehensive plan draft section on substance abuse was modeled after the NLC and NACO Report, referenced above.[72] The county's draft comprehensive plan features a chapter organized around the four central recommendations of the Report: (1) Leading in a crisis; (2) prevention and education; (3) expanding treatment; and (4) reassessing public safety and law enforcement. The recommendations for addressing the opioid crisis in Mercer County are being replicated in other comprehensive plans in West Virginia and can stand as a model for local governments also seeking to address the opioid epidemic.

While the framework of the Mercer County comprehensive plan section on substance abuse is generally modeled after *A Prescription for Action,* county officials ensured that each recommendation was appropriate for their community. Planning commissioners, citizens, and field experts helped create a prioritized list of goals, objectives, and action steps to address substance abuse in the county. These goals, objectives and action steps were developed by communities in West Virginia; they enhance and provide substance to the goals in *A Prescription for Action.*

The following section summarizes the Mercer County, West Virginia comprehensive plan draft section on substance abuse:

Leading in a Crisis

Mercer County's draft comprehensive plan calls on officials to lead conversations on opioids and help overturn the stigma attached to addiction. Community leaders, particularly those who are elected and hold positions of trust, are encouraged to initiate candid, respectful, and compassionate discussions. Confronting the "elephant in the room" and admitting that a problem exists is the first step in finding solutions. Efforts to increase recognition of the problem could include hosting "town hall" discussions and conducting public outreach through county health departments, health care providers, and local law enforcement departments. Including individuals affected by addiction in the public input process can help identify needed resources or gaps in resources for opioid-addicted individuals. The absence of formal programs for prevention or treatment can be spearheaded by local officials.

Local officials can also bring positivity to the conversation and motivate the public to reach out to friends and family to offer support. Communities can often find backing in non-profits, local associations, service organizations, and religious groups. Additionally, officials should foster regional cooperation to help gather data, ideas, and resources. Because the opioid epidemic is so pervasive throughout the country it makes little sense to address the crisis in small community "silos."

Prevention and Education

Increasing community awareness and educating the public about the dangers of opioid misuse at an early age are essential to curbing the proliferation of addiction. Many individuals unknowingly become addicted after being prescribed pain-management opioids following an injury or surgery. Educating individuals before receiving prescription medication or obtaining illegal opioids is essential.

Communities should increase education and recreational opportunities to school-aged children to curb addiction. Local law enforcement and health professionals can host programs during school hours to educate on the dangers of opioids.