

# Project Hope: Awareness Campaign

Julie Snyder,  
Vice President, Corporate Relations



**BlueCross BlueShield**  
of Western New York

# BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York



- Community-based, not for profit health plan
- Part of the BlueCross BlueShield Association
- Established in 1936
- Headquartered in Buffalo, New York
- 800,000+ members
- 1,800 employees
- HealthNow New York Inc. is parent company



# Buffalo Niagara Region

- Buffalo is second largest city in the state of New York
- Urban, suburban and rural communities comprise the 8 county region
- City of Buffalo has 4<sup>th</sup> highest poverty rate in the nation (US Census Bureau)
- State of New York, Federal Government , State University at Buffalo (largest SUNY Campus), M&T Bank, Delaware North Companies, Moog, and region's health systems are among the top employers
- Niagara Falls, New York is part of the region and home to Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station
- Currently enjoying an economic and cultural renaissance



# “Our youth are dying”

- Today, 2,000 kids will use painkillers for the first time
- 44% of teens have at least one friend who abuses painkillers
- 25% of teens take painkillers prescribed to someone else
- 40% of teens think prescription painkillers are less dangerous than street drugs
- 15,000 people a year die from painkillers. More than half of abusers are between the ages of 12 and 25
- Transition from painkillers to Heroin is well documented





# “Our youth are dying”



**20-YEAR-OLD MICHAEL ISRAEL WAS PRESCRIBED HYDROCODONE TO TAKE AWAY HIS PAIN AFTER STOMACH SURGERY.**

**WHEN HE COULDN'T BREAK HIS ADDICTION TO THE DRUG, HE TOOK HIS OWN LIFE.**

**HIS PARENTS HAVE YET TO FIND A PILL THAT CAN TAKE AWAY THEIR PAIN.**

 **PAINKILLERS KILL MORE THAN PAIN**  
[painkillersKILL.org](http://painkillersKILL.org)

Prescription painkillers have a purpose. But they're just as addictive as street drugs like heroin. Get the facts today.

- It started with one BlueCross BlueShield member
- Parents of Michael Israel came to us after their son committed suicide
- Michael was “prescribed into addition.”
- His father, an electrician, noted “I sat next to my son, and trusted that the doctor was prescribing safe medication. There were no warnings. I just didn’t know.”
- His plea: “Educate”



# “Our youth are dying”

Original photography by Max Collins



## We tried to make a difference

- A community campaign – to stress the danger of painkiller addiction and provide access to treatment and support
- Outreach to the medical community – goal wasn't to accuse physicians of wrongdoing
- We sought community and media buy-in
- Created a middle school-based curriculum
- Funded a compelling documentary (with local PBS affiliate WNED-TV) to launch more dialogue throughout the region





## We tried to make a difference

- Launched a 24-7 hotline (with Horizon Health) that families could call for help
- Raised funds for the campaign, from the private sector and local foundations
- Established boundaries – we would educate, but not concentrate on advocacy in Albany or Washington
- Leveraged our “Blue brand” – the most trusted in health care – to step into an issue that wasn’t pleasant or “healthy”





# Response

- Broad based support
- Everyone said yes
- Over \$1.1 million of donated media inventory and resources
- \$300,000 out-of-pocket funding by BCBS of WNY and local foundations
- “Everyone” had a story



# “Project Hope”

- Continuing Medical Education (CME)
- 30-minute documentary — “Tragedy and Hope”
- Public service campaign: television, radio, on-line, social media, billboard, print advertising
- Curriculum and education for middle schools
- Information cards for pharmacies and doctors’ offices
- Aggressive public relations
- Unique website for one-stop resource and 24/7 hotline — [www.painkillerskill.org](http://www.painkillerskill.org)



# Campaign creative



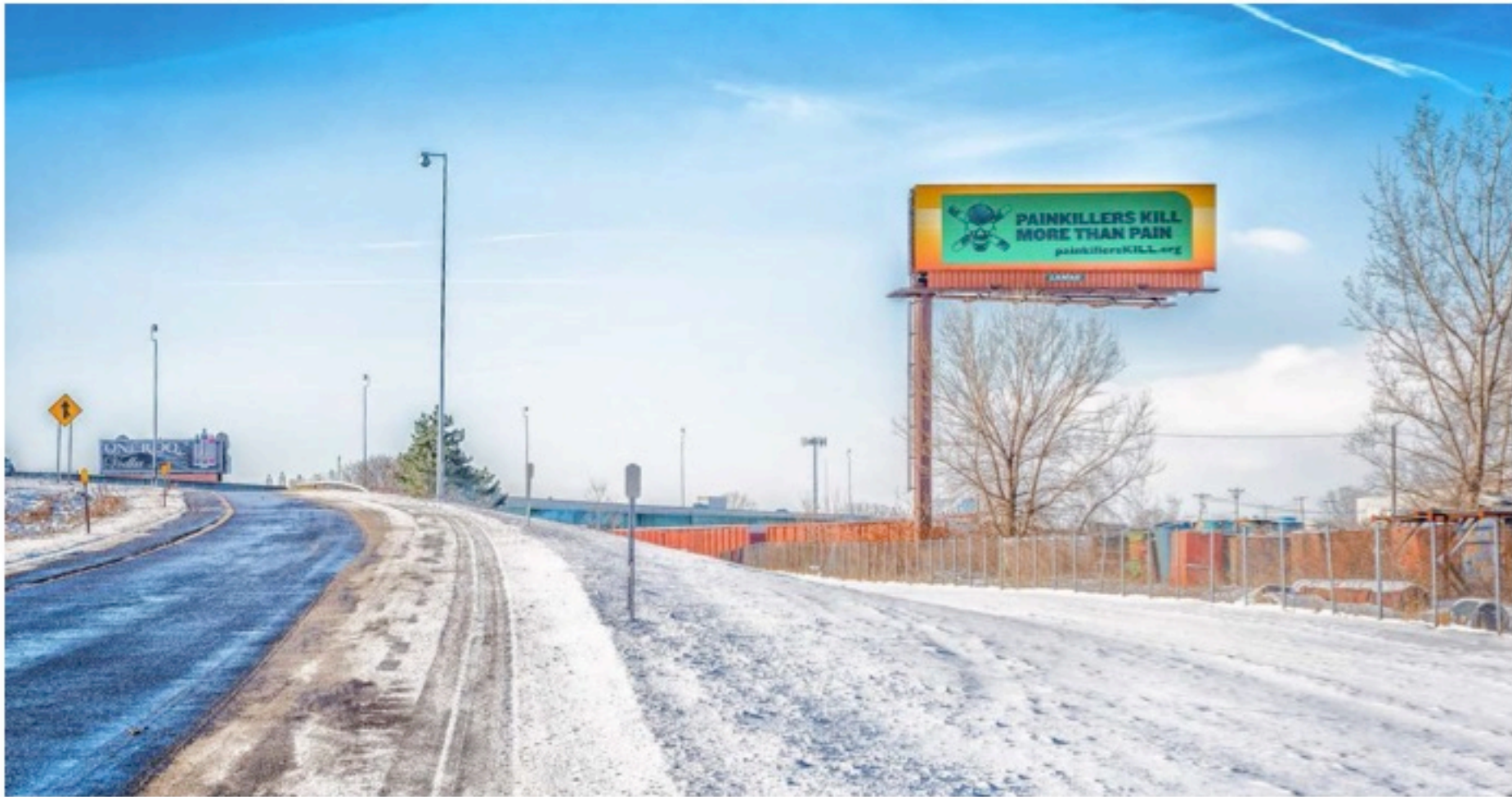
**PAINKILLERS KILL  
MORE THAN PAIN**

**painkillersKILL.org**





# Campaign creative





# Tragedy and Hope



# Information Cards

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- Keep the lines of communication open between you and your children
- Consult with your health care provider (your doctor, dentist, or pharmacist) about alternatives to opiates
- Keep your prescriptions in a secure place that is inaccessible to other people
- Stay educated. Ask for help – resources are available at [painkillersKILL.org](http://painkillersKILL.org)

**PAINKILLERS KILL MORE THAN PAIN**

FACTS & RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE  
[painkillersKILL.org](http://painkillersKILL.org)

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- **Information cards** distributed at Western New York pharmacies (Tops, Wegmans, Walgreens, Rite Aid Pharmacy)
- Endorsement by the Pharmacists' Association of Western New York (PAWNY) comprised of 75 independently-owned pharmacies), doctors' offices and schools
- Available in physician's offices
- Distributed by the Western New York Labor Council



# Goals of Painkillers Kill campaign

- Increase awareness and provide education to the medical community
- Increase awareness of the issue to the community-at-large
- Increase awareness and education, and provide resources to parents and young adults

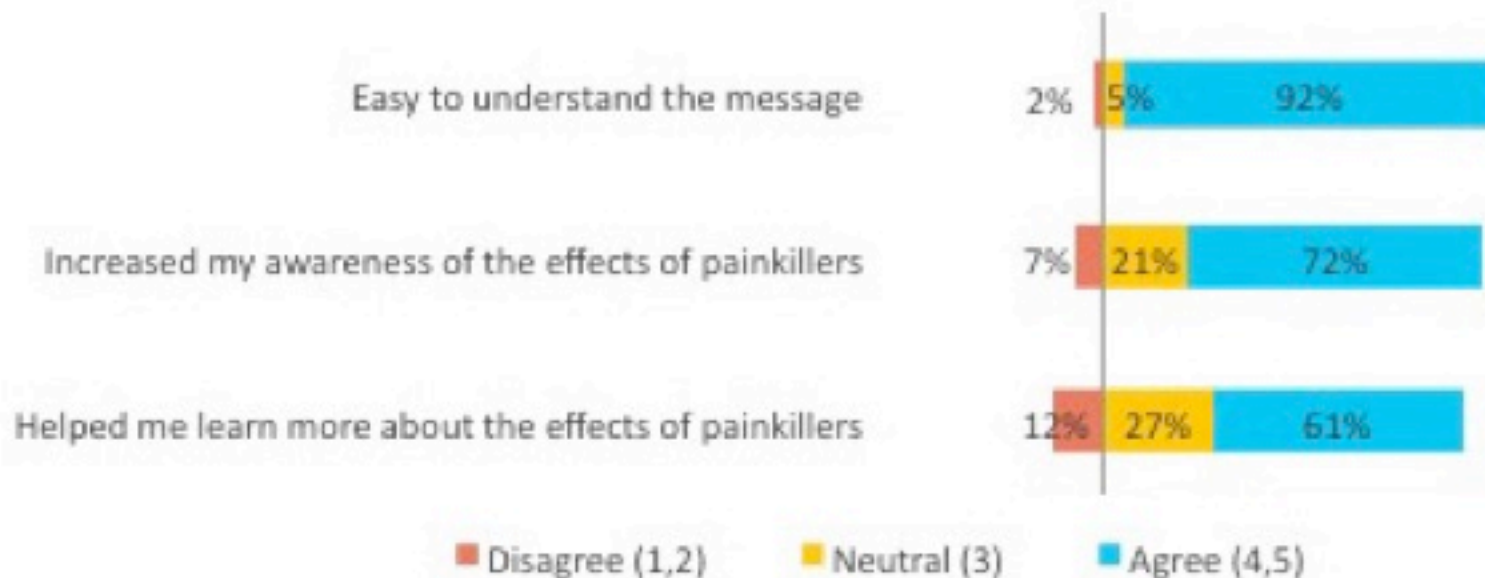




# Impact of initial campaign

## Awareness

- 2 in 3 consumers recall seeing the campaign
- Of those, 72% stated that the information provided increased their awareness of the effects of painkillers





# Impact of initial campaign

## Education

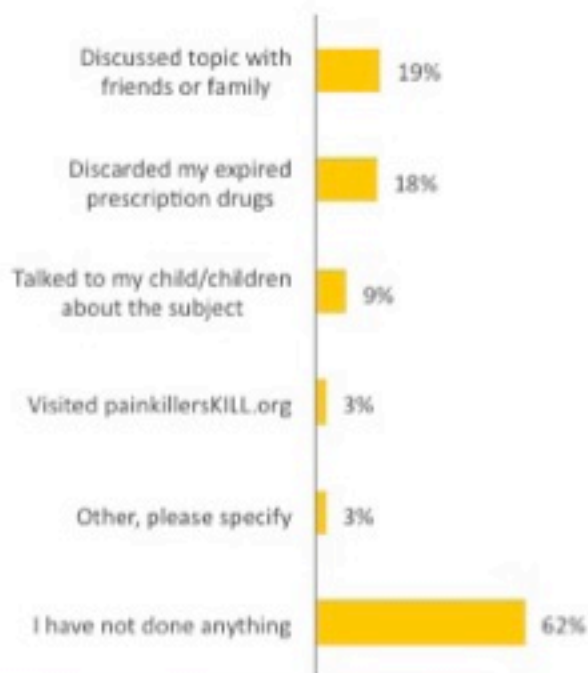
- 95% of consumers recognize that prescription painkillers are highly addictive
- One-third stated painkillers are a synthetic form of heroin



# Impact of initial campaign

## Action taken

- Over 1 in 3 consumers took action, most often by:
  - Discussing with friends and/or family
  - Discarding expired medications



# Impact of initial campaign

USA TODAY  
October 14, 2015

## NATION

### More states cracking down on prescription-drug abuse

Opioid painkillers cause more to OD than cocaine, heroin

Matthew Deans  
The Times

increase. Michael Jones' death of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in 2012 was a tragedy. The Buffalo 20-year-old had been diagnosed about his addiction to the powerful painkillers prescribed for his cousin James.

"But the ultimate lesson regarding us alone this is happen every day," he writes, and Jones, and just west of the state University of New York-Buffalo State, where he was part of the announcement of a warning New York public awareness campaign about the dangers of prescription-drug abuse.

"We want to stop the dying of our youth," he said.

The campaign, which grew out of a push by anti-trust allies for state-level, business-friendly, TV, print, and online advertising, a website, and a documentary that will air Oct. 22 on Buffalo-area TV stations.

An Israel has been a frequent and vocal advocate since 2012 for tackling the growing problem of prescription-drug abuse, including testimony in 2012 before the U.S. House Committee on International Narcotics Control. His advocacy helped lead to New York lawmakers unanimously passing the Internet System for Tracking Over-Prescribing law, or "STOP," which went into effect in August.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2012 called prescription drug abuse the fastest-growing drug problem in the United States. Between 1999 and 2010, the number of deaths nationwide from opioid painkillers such as hydrocodone and oxycodone nearly quadrupled, and each overdose claim more deaths than cocaine and heroin combined, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



...in a public awareness campaign in Buffalo, N.Y., that has led to a 10% drop in opioid prescriptions in the area.

claims, and making "doctor shopping" for prescription drugs a crime punishable by up to a year in jail.

• **Indiana** this year gave the state attorney general oversight powers on pain-management clinics and to require licensed auxiliary medical drug dispensing of people prescribed opioids to ensure they're taking the drugs as prescribed.

• **Kentucky** in 2010 began requiring licensing of pain clinics, requiring law enforcement officers greater access to the state's prescription drug monitoring database, and requiring doctors to examine patients and check electronic prescription records before writing opioid prescriptions.

• **Washington** state in 2012 started asking doctors to document and review when prescribing pain medication. Any prescriptions over a certain amount require a second opinion from a pain specialist.

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Source: The Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Community Relations Campaign of the Year, PRWeek Awards, March 2015.
- "Serving New York Award", New York State Broadcaster's Association Inc., November 2014.
- Community Service Award, Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers of New York State (ASAP), October 2014.
- Community Outreach Campaign of the Year, Healthcare Marketing IMPACT Awards presented by Modern Healthcare and Advertising Age, September 2014.



ASAP NYS



Modern Healthcare Advertising Age



There's more  
to be done





# There's more to be done

- 147 fatal opioid-related overdoses in 2015 alone, with Erie County health officials predicting 275 fatalities by year's end.
- According to The Buffalo News, number of deaths countywide last year was 128, meaning this year's totals have already surpassed the amount of overdoses in 2014.
- The Erie County Health Department also reported that between 2012 and 2014 there were 331 fatal opiate overdoses.
- Since last year, local treatment facilities report opiate and heroin overdoses are up over 480% in Buffalo



# There's more to be done



Daniel  
Niagara Falls



Michael  
Buffalo



Adrianne  
Buffalo

# Next steps

National PBS documentary, produced by WNED



**BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Association**





®



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**BlueCross BlueShield**  
of Western New York