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 **Newton County, Georgia**

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Newton allocates some opioid settlement funds

By Alice Queen, 1 days ago

COVINGTON — Some of the funds received through settlements of class action lawsuits against companies that manufacture, distribute and sell prescription opioids have been allocated to address the impact of the opioid crisis in Newton County.

The Board of Commissioners approved the allocation of \$125,000 in opioid settlement funds at its Oct. 7 meeting. The allocations were based on recommendations by a committee formed to advise the BOC.

Finance Director Brittany White previously told commissioners that the county's opioid settlement fund stands at about \$512,736. She said the county will continue to receive the funds for the next 18 years at a rate of about \$70,000 per year.

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Allocations approved Oct. 7 are as follows:



- ◆ Piedmont Newton Hospital — a one time allocation of \$50,000 to fund seclusion-capable doors designed for designated care rooms in the Emergency Department. These doors provide a safer, controlled environment for patients in behavioral health crisis; reduce the risk of injury to patients, nurses and staff; support de-escalation and stabilization while maintaining dignity and privacy; and ensure compliance with recommended standards of care for behavioral health emergencies.

- ◆ Viewpoint Health — an annual allocation of \$50,000, until funds are exhausted, to provide intensive services, including: ordering, securing and administering opioid antagonists to residents of Newton County with persistent opioid use disorder on a daily basis while in treatment; individual counseling; and group counseling.

- ◆ Newton County Emergency Management — an allocation of \$25,000 for the purchase of naloxone kits and cabinets for each building managed by Newton County, including: 240 kits; 48 cabinets; and training for employees that will be conducted by EMA at no additional cost. The kits and cabinets will be placed in 16 county buildings, at four parks, at six convenience centers, at six Sheriff's Office buildings; and as 12 Fire Services buildings. The allocation includes enough funding to replenish naloxone kits as needed for the remainder of this fiscal year.

Under the terms of the opioid settlement agreements funds may be used only for programs targeted toward opioid use disorder, education of first responders, treatment options, and opioid abuse prevention programs.

In May 2018 Newton County joined other jurisdictions in lawsuits filed against multiple manufacturers and distributors of opioids, seeking to hold them responsible for their role in the opioid epidemic. The county was represented by Blasingame, Burch, Garrard & Ashley P.C. of Athens.

The lawsuits targeted more than 20 companies that manufacture and distribute opioids, and alleged the defendants misrepresented the addictive risks of opioids, fraudulently marketed opioids as a treatment for chronic pain, and did not follow federal laws regarding the reporting of excessive opioid sales in certain areas.

Dozens of Georgia counties, cities and hospital authorities joined in the lawsuit.

