

Summit focuses on coordinating efforts to fight drug abuse

August 24 2016, by Dan Sewell

State Supreme Court justices and other high-ranking officials huddled Wednesday to discuss ways to coordinate efforts to battle the drug abuse epidemic in a judicial summit involving some of the hardest-hit states.

Ohio Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor stressed the need for improving collaboration across borders and jurisdictions at the opening of the three-day, nine-state conference in Cincinnati. Among initial priorities are identifying best practices for testing and treatment services and increasing access to prescription [drug](#) data.

"The importance and effectiveness of integrating opioid prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery efforts across government and state lines cannot be overstated," O'Connor said. "In fact, there is no other choice."

O'Connor said rehabilitation, treatment and other anti-drug programs can be complicated when offenders and families move to new [states](#). There is also an impact on child custody, with parental drug problems becoming a leading issue in such cases.

"What happens in Michigan impacts Tennessee, what occurs in West Virginia influences Illinois, and what affects Pennsylvania makes its mark in Kentucky," O'Connor said. The text of her remarks to the closed conference was provided to The Associated Press.

She said anti-drug efforts must go beyond arrest, jail and release, which

have led to high rates of return to criminal behavior and incarcerations.

Kentucky Chief Justice John Minton also spoke Wednesday morning.

Federal and state authorities and private sector experts planned to provide briefings to the court officials. What's called the Regional Judicial Opioid Initiative is meant to begin continuing regional planning and action on [opioid abuse](#), mainly from prescription painkillers and heroin.

The states participating are Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia were among the five states with the highest rates of [drug overdose deaths](#) in 2014, while Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia were among 14 states that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified with significant drug overdose death rate increases from 2013 to 2014.

Underscoring the problem, Cincinnati police reported a surge of drug overdoses this week, saying there were as many as 30 on Tuesday. They were investigating and said no deaths had been reported.

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