Two million Americans are addicted to prescription opioids and opioid overdose is the leading cause of accidental death, yet nearly 80% of people with opioid addiction do not receive treatment.

**Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes)**

America’s widespread opioid epidemic places a heavy financial burden on our health care, criminal justice, and social support systems. Despite the pervasiveness of opioid addiction and its profound effect on families, communities, and our clients, the health care delivery system has not effectively addressed the chronic nature of opioid use disorder.

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is a proven evidence-based practice that can be life-saving for people with opioid use disorder (OUD). MAT combines the use of medication with proven behavioral therapies, such as psychotherapy or cognitive behavioral therapy, to provide a holistic approach to overcoming opioid dependence.

Adherence and access to MAT are key levers for long-term retention and recovery. When patients adhere to MAT, it can decrease cravings, help prevent relapse, and reduce all-cause mortality.

Despite the effectiveness of MAT, few people have access to this proven therapy. Given the quick, dramatic rise in opioid misuse, there is a significant gap between the number of individuals with OUD and current treatment capacity. A major driver of current MAT underutilization is the lack of providers with specialty training who are approved and willing to treat those with OUD. Among those approved, many physicians often prescribe MAT to much fewer patients than they are enabled to treat.

Beacon hopes to bridge that gap as an official Project ECHO partner. Project ECHO supports and educates MAT prescribers so they gain valuable experience and ultimately treat more patients with OUD. Beacon’s evidence-based approach to managing OUD includes MAT, community support, and other recovery-oriented interventions. With more people adhering to MAT, we can help reduce the all-cause mortality rate.

**THE BEACON SOLUTION - PROJECT ECHO**

Project ECHO is a telementoring platform that links specialists with nonspecialists through virtual clinics, where the specialists mentor participants and share their knowledge through case-based learning and guided practice.

Nonspecialists include primary care providers, psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and other community-based clinicians.

This “hub-and-spoke” learning model enables primary care providers and other clinicians to develop the skills needed to treat patients with complex, chronic conditions, such as opioid addiction, within their own communities.

**IMPACT OF OPIOID USE DISORDER**

- 91 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose (CDC).
- The economic impact of prescription opioid misuse is estimated at $78.5 billion annually (CDC).
- Emergency department and inpatient care for opioid poisonings is over $20 billion (CDC).
- Employers lose $10 billion a year due to opioid-related absenteeism and lost productivity (ASAM).
- Health care costs are twice as high for workers addicted to opioids.
As a Project ECHO hub, Beacon focuses specifically on medication-assisted treatment for OUD. A key advantage of MAT is that it can be prescribed in primary care settings as well as specialty substance use disorder treatment programs. Our goal is to increase overall provider and support staff competency and confidence in using MAT to treat patients with opioid use disorder.

HOW PROJECT ECHO WORKS

Through Project ECHO, Beacon helps providers stay informed on the latest advancements in evidence-based, best practice care by equipping them with MAT treatment guidelines, tools, and patient resources. This format not only builds provider capabilities in prescribing MAT but also improves the way providers manage patients with OUD.

Most importantly, Beacon will increase network capacity for best-practice MAT within the local delivery system, particularly in historically underserved areas and those with psychiatry shortages. By training more clinicians to administer and monitor MAT, Beacon expands member access to this much-needed, highly effective treatment option. Adhering to MAT can help patients:

- Reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms
- Decrease the risk of relapse
- Prevent overdose
- Increase adherence to long-term treatment
- Improve other health outcomes

The most important downstream effect for members, their families, and our clients is that MAT can help reduce all-cause mortality.

ABOUT BEACON AND PROJECT ECHO

Project ECHO is recognized as a national model for delivering care in underserved communities with the passage of the Expanding Capacity for Health Outcomes Act. Beacon is the first managed care organization to participate as a Project ECHO partner and use this innovative telementoring approach to improve access to MAT for persons with opioid use disorder.

Beacon is the largest specialty behavioral health company in the U.S. We are singularly focused on mental health and substance use disorder services as well as specialty care including OUD treatment and autism care management. Our behavioral health services give individuals and their families the help they need for addiction, depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, and more.

Beacon’s hub features a multidisciplinary team comprised of staff from:

- Counseling
- Peer support
- Pharmacy
- Addictionology
- Case management
- Social work
- General psychiatry

Last year, the U.S. Surgeon General asked more 2.3 million providers and health care leaders to address the opioid crisis by educating ourselves, screening patients for OUD, and treating opioid addiction as a chronic illness.

Beacon is doing our part by helping prescribers gain confidence to administer MAT, expanding access to MAT in our local markets, and implementing a chronic disease approach to OUD treatment across our organization.

To learn more about Beacon and Project ECHO, email us at: ProjectECHO@beaconhealthoptions.com