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Ohio Marks One-Year Anniversary of Youth Drug Prevention Initiative, Announces New Component to Help Ohio Businesses Promote Drug-Free Employees

COLUMBUS, Ohio – It began one year ago with a simple challenge to parents and teachers: Start Talking! Today, the Kasich Administration touted the first year successes of its statewide Start Talking! youth drug prevention initiative, which is inspired by research that shows youth are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs when parents and adults talk with them about substance use and abuse.. Ohio Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor and members of Gov. John R. Kasich’s Cabinet were joined by leadership from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, business leaders from around the state and a host of other supporters as they also unveiled a new component of the initiative – Start Talking! BIZ (Business Impact Zone) – a collection of tools and resources specifically designed to help Ohio businesses address substance abuse and addiction in the workplace.

“One year ago, our administration made a commitment to take a more aggressive approach when it comes to combating drug addiction in Ohio,” said Lt. Governor Mary Taylor. “Start Talking! has been a huge success and we’re pleased to start a new initiative with the business community to improve and grow our outreach across the state. Ohio businesses have been great partners on a number of issues and I look forward to the impact Start Talking! BIZ will have on our communities and the lives of our children.”

Last year, an estimated 50,000 Ohioans received free, bi-weekly parenting tips, including more than 6,000 school counselors, principals and administrators and all foster parents in Ohio. Working with local police, the State Highway Patrol and Ohio National Guard reached more than 26,000 students and recruited 779 student ambassadors to help spread the prevention message. The Office of the First Lady, meanwhile, partnered with the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based Initiatives to award 22 grants totaling \$1.5 million to help strengthen school-based prevention and resiliency programming for at-risk youth, and dozens of schools, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, legislators and others sponsored educational town hall meetings and drug-free events.

“The response from families, schools and communities has been phenomenal,” said Tracy Plouck, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. “We are thrilled so many Ohioans have put these tools to good use in classrooms and homes across the state, and look forward to building on the momentum by strengthening our partnerships with Ohio’s business community.”

With the launch of Start Talking! BIZ, state leaders are strengthening the fight to prevent substance abuse into the workplace. A new set of tools, specifically designed to help employers be a part of the solution to the epidemic is being created. The new resources include videos, Power Point presentations and free Start Talking! BIZ tips -- bi-weekly tips to help employers stay on top of current drug trends, stimulate conversations with employees about drug-free workplaces and assist employees who need help for an alcohol or other drug problem.

“Every year, the misuse and abuse of drugs and alcohol robs workplaces of their most valuable assets: present, clear-thinking, productive working adults,” said Dee Mason, founder and president of *Working Partners®*, a Columbus-based consulting firm helping with the project. “Through this partnership, Ohio is showing its commitment to the business community and providing employers working knowledge and tools to protect their bottom lines.”

Ohio businesses have a vested interest in getting involved, Mason said. Studies show that substance abuse costs American employers more than \$81 billion in lost operations annually. According to Mason, substance abusers: are one-third less productive than non-abusers, miss work an average of eight weeks more a year than non-abusers, use 300-400 percent more medical benefits, account for 50-80 percent of workplace shrinkage and theft, have 3.6 times more accidents on the job and five times more accidents off the job and account for 51 percent of workers’ compensation claims.

Start Talking, page 2

“Drug related issues are a growing concern to Ohio’s employers,” said Andrew E. Doehrel, President & CEO of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. “We believe the partnership with Start Talking! BIZ makes sense as it provides business leaders with the tools to aid their employees in combating this horrible nationwide problem.”

Doehrel noted that employers have financial incentive to get involved by motivating their workforces to join the battle against substance abuse, especially as Ohio continues its fight to stem the tide of opiate addiction. He explained, for example, that the costs of prescription opiate abuse are often thought to be related to increased costs of law enforcement and incarceration. However in reality, of the \$55.7 billion in costs related to opiate abuse in 2009, criminal justice costs accounted for just 9 percent of the total dollars or roughly \$5.1 billion. The real costs were found in the workplace – nearly 46 percent (\$25.6B) of the total price tag.

In August, the Kroger Company became the first Ohio employer to partner with the state on its Start Talking! initiative. The Cincinnati-based grocer ran a month-long promotional campaign that included in-store radio messages, signage promotional messages on prescription medication bags and information for employees. Since then, more and more businesses have expressed an interest in getting involved with the initiative, not only to promote the involvement of parents and caregivers within their work environments, but to build strong, drug-free workplace initiatives.

Learn more about the initiative, view the annual report and sign up for free prevention tips at StartTalking.ohio.gov. Connect with StartTalking! on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/StartTalkingOhio>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/StartTalkingOH>).

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