

OUTSTANDING GOVERNMENT SERVICE



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Dr. Susan M. Kansagra is the Section Chief of the Division of Public Health: Chronic Disease and Injury for the Department of Health and Human Services. She oversees a sprawling body of work aimed at reducing death and disabilities related to chronic disease. The national opioid epidemic is a special focus of her work. Previously, as a primary care physician serving in an area of Boston hard hit by opioid addiction, Kansagra's interactions with addicts who were "walking and talking one day, and dead the next," moved her to find a solution to deal with the devastating effects of opioid addiction.

Kansagra came to DHHS in 2017 with a mandate: Design the state's response to the opioid epidemic. In two short years, she has gone above and beyond to build a coordinated, well-funded, and effective infrastructure to combat the epidemic. She was the driving force behind the state's Opioid Action Plan in 2017 and its substantial update for 2019. In 2017, North Carolina received over \$31 million in federal funding that allowed the Division of Public Health to provide treatment to more than 5,700 people who would not otherwise have access.

As a result of her efforts and through statewide collaborations, overdose deaths and overdose emergency room visits have declined by 20% in North Carolina and dispensing of opioids has declined by nearly the same amount. DHHS data show that 2018 represented the first "breakthrough year" in the opioid epidemic since deaths from opioid overdoses began to accelerate a decade ago.

