WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Barbara A. Mikulski and Ben Cardin, together with U.S. Representatives Steny H. Hoyer, Elijah E. Cummings, Chris Van Hollen, C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger, John P. Sarbanes, Donna F. Edwards and John Delaney (all D-Md.) Aug. 17 announced that $2.5 million in federal funding has been awarded to the Washington/Baltimore region together with regional partners to combat heroin and fentanyl drug trafficking through the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program. The Washington/Baltimore HIDTA will also receive nearly $250,000 to support drug trafficking prosecution of those supplying heroin and fentanyl to Baltimore.

In addition to the Baltimore/Washington HIDTA, regional programs in Appalachia, New England, Philadelphia/Camden, and New York/New Jersey will share in the $2.5 million in federal funding for the Heroin Response Strategy in an unprecedented partnership to address the severe heroin threat facing those communities.

“The crisis of increased heroin use in Maryland and across America is destroying families and ravaging communities. It cuts across class, race and age,” Senator Mikulski said. “I’m fighting to address the heroin problem head on. These funds in the federal checkbook will help us to crack down on dealers while working to break the cycle of addiction for drug users.”

“Every part of Maryland is working to confront the rise in heroin trafficking and opiate-related medical emergencies, and this federal funding can provide critical support in their efforts to stop the suffering that inevitably accompanies the spread of this scourge,” said Senator Cardin. “This funding also will boost the capacity for regional cooperation among law enforcement officials and agencies, a welcome counter-measure to a complex and persistent threat to our communities.”

“I’m pleased that our region will be receiving this funding through HIDTA to help communities deal with the challenge of heroin trafficking in our state. We need to muster all available resources at the federal, state, and local levels to address this growing epidemic in our state, especially in the Fifth District where we have seen a dramatic increase in the use of heroin as well as deaths related to overdose,” Congressman Hoyer said. “I’m proud to be a longtime supporter of the HIDTA program and will continue to work with my colleagues in the Maryland delegation to ensure that law enforcement in our state receives robust federal assistance to keep drugs out of our schools and off our streets.”

“It is only when we all work together, at the local, state, and federal levels, that we can begin to eradicate problems like heroin use and drug trafficking from our communities,” Congressman Cummings said. “In Baltimore and around this country, these HIDTA efforts give us hope that we can reclaim our cities, bring safety and security to our streets, and dream of brighter futures for our children.”

“With deaths from heroin increasing in Maryland, we have to make every effort to get the upper hand and address this public health crisis,” said Congressman Van Hollen. “This funding will increase public safety, improve the effectiveness of our anti-drug strategies, and help ensure police and other public safety officials are adequately trained to respond to heroin and drug related calls.”

“We have all heard the dire calls from heroin users and their families for expanded treatment options, additional training of law enforcement on the use of naloxone and the need for increased communication about bad batches of heroin plaguing our streets,” Congressman Ruppersberger said. “Funding for the Heroin Response Strategy will enable us to effectively address trends in heroin use and get more help to more people suffering from the disease of addiction.”

“This grant funding is a tremendous boost to our fight against heroin abuse in Maryland,” said Congressman Sarbanes. “By providing local and state law enforcement with improved intelligence gathering resources and information analysis capabilities, we can more effectively combat heroin trafficking across our state.”

“At a roundtable earlier this month first responders and community stakeholders shared how heroin and other opioid-related drugs are devastating families and impacting communities in the 4th Congressional District,” Congresswoman Edwards said. “This federal funding will help develop a network of public health and public safety partnerships at every level to coordinate an effective response to this epidemic. Moreover, I welcome the Administration’s leadership to expand naloxone access and training for first responders. It’s time for Congress to act to broaden these life-saving initiatives.”

“Heroin trafficking is hurting Maryland, where we have seen a tragic increase in heroin-related deaths in recent years,” said Congressman Delaney. “A problem this big will require a federal, state and local response and additional federal funds to the Washington/Baltimore region are a step in the right direction. Stopping heroin is about public safety and public health and I applaud additional funding being provided to prosecute traffickers, help those who are addicted and support local law enforcement, first responders and health care providers.”

According to the Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, in 2014 there were 578 heroin-related deaths in the state, 25 percent higher than previous year and more than double the total in 2010. Only 11 percent of heroin addicts who need treatment receive it according to National Institute of Drug Abuse.

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the Heroin Response Strategy will foster a collaborative network of public health-public safety partnerships to address the heroin/opioid epidemic from multiple perspectives. The Strategy will enhance the efficacy and efficiency of the criminal intelligence process in support of cooperative law enforcement operations. The five HIDTAs will create a 15-state network of experienced, connected law enforcement contacts and leverage these connections and information-gathering capabilities with a strong, complementary, analytical capacity.

The five HIDTAs will select two centrally located Regional Coordinators, one with a public health focus and the other with a public safety focus, who will manage and oversee implementation and operation of the Heroin Response Teams. The Public Health Coordinator will oversee regional reporting of fatal and non-fatal overdose information and issuing of relevant alerts regarding dangerous batches of heroin and other heroin-related threats to health authorities. This will mobilize a rapid public health response to distribute naloxone or expand resources in the affected areas, helping to mitigate the number of overdoses and prevent deaths. The Public Safety Coordinator will oversee execution of public safety goals by ensuring case support is provided where needed and intelligence is being disseminated to relevant law enforcement authorities to enable disruption of the heroin supply.
A heroin and prescription opioid training curriculum will be developed and used to prepare rural and municipal officers and first responders who are inexperienced responding to heroin and prescription opioid-related incidents. To assist communities in coping with this escalating problem, the five HIDTAs will develop Education & Training strategies that will increase awareness of heroin and opiate addiction, create linkages to available prevention and treatment resources in the respective regions, and enable first-responders to know how to report all pertinent lead information developed from seizures and overdose responses.

The Heroin Response Strategy builds upon the successes of the 2014 symposium hosted by the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA. Each year, the five HIDTAs will host two, two-day State of the Region symposia at a jointly nominated HIDTA. These symposia will build additional structure within each respective HIDTA region for the attendees to maintain regular contact and continue their public health-public safety partnerships between symposia. The aim will be to facilitate collaboration between public health and public safety partners within and across jurisdictions, sharing best practices, innovative pilots, and identifying new opportunities to leverage resources.