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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Knock Out Opioid Abuse Initiative with Former NFL Quarterback Ray Lucas at Camden High School

Camden, NJ — Student-athletes at Camden High School will receive crucial education on the risks of prescription opioids from a quarterback with first-hand knowledge of their devastating impact.

Former NFL player and New Jersey native Ray Lucas will headline a program at 10 a.m., Wednesday, October 30, at Camden High School, 1700 Park Boulevard, Camden. The event is part of the Knock Out Opioid Abuse initiative, organized by the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey (PDFNJ) and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey (Horizon BCBSNJ), in collaboration with the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA), the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, and the Center for Family Services.

This initiative aims to engage high school students and educate them about the dangers of opioid misuse and the importance of maintaining physical and mental health. High school athletes are particularly vulnerable to opioid misuse, often due to injuries that require pain management.

"Our goal is to provide students with the critical information they need to protect their health and make informed decisions about prescription opioids," said Angelo Valente, Executive Director of PDFNJ. "Ray Lucas's story is both a powerful warning about the risks of opioid misuse and an inspiring message of hope and recovery."

Lucas, a former standout quarterback at Rutgers who enjoyed an eight-year career in the NFL, will share insights from his battle with opioid misuse, which began following his professional playing days, and his journey to recovery. Lucas has spoken candidly about his struggles and focuses on empowering youth to make informed decisions about prescription medications.

"Horizon and the Partnership are proud to continue our ongoing work to bring these important and educational town halls to more high schools across the state," said Jonathan R. Pearson, Executive Director, Corporate Social Responsibility, at Horizon BCBSNJ. "Through the powerful voice of Ray Lucas and the broad reach of the NJSIAA, we will continue to raise awareness of opioid misuse at New Jersey schools where students learn, play sports, and socialize."



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In a recent 12-month survey by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 12 percent of male athletes and 8 percent of female athletes had used prescription opioids. A Monitoring the Future survey also found that adolescent participants in high-injury sports had 50 percent higher odds of nonmedical use of prescription opioids than adolescents who did not participate in these types of sports. According to NJ CARES, there were 1,332 suspected overdose deaths from January through August 31. In Camden County, there were 143 suspected drug-related deaths in that time period.

Supported through grants by Horizon's philanthropic arm, The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey, the Knock Out Opioid Abuse initiative is now in its fourth phase. The initiative began with the Town Hall Series held for all 21 New Jersey counties in 2017 and 2018. The program expanded in 2019 and 2020 to include a prescriber education webinar, parent education through PDFNJ's 5th Grade Parent Alert, and community outreach via a statewide awareness public service campaign. The second phase also included community town halls, which were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and held as webinars in the spring and fall of 2020. The third phase of the partnership focused on student-athletes and featured NJSIAA in a collaborative role. Lucas served as the keynote speaker at 10 events throughout the state.

The fourth phase of the program kicked off in May at Don Bosco Preparatory High School, where Lucas shared his story of addiction and recovery with the entire student body of about 700 students. Jefferson Township High School and Sussex County Technical School have recently hosted events to kick off the 2024-25 school year. The series will continue on December 5 at 9 a.m. at the Performing Arts Center of Middle Township in Cape May Court House.

For more information, visit knockoutopioidabuse.drugfreenj.org

WHEN: October 30, 2024 | 10:00 AM - 11:00 PM

WHERE: Camden High Campus
1700 Park Blvd. Camden, NJ

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