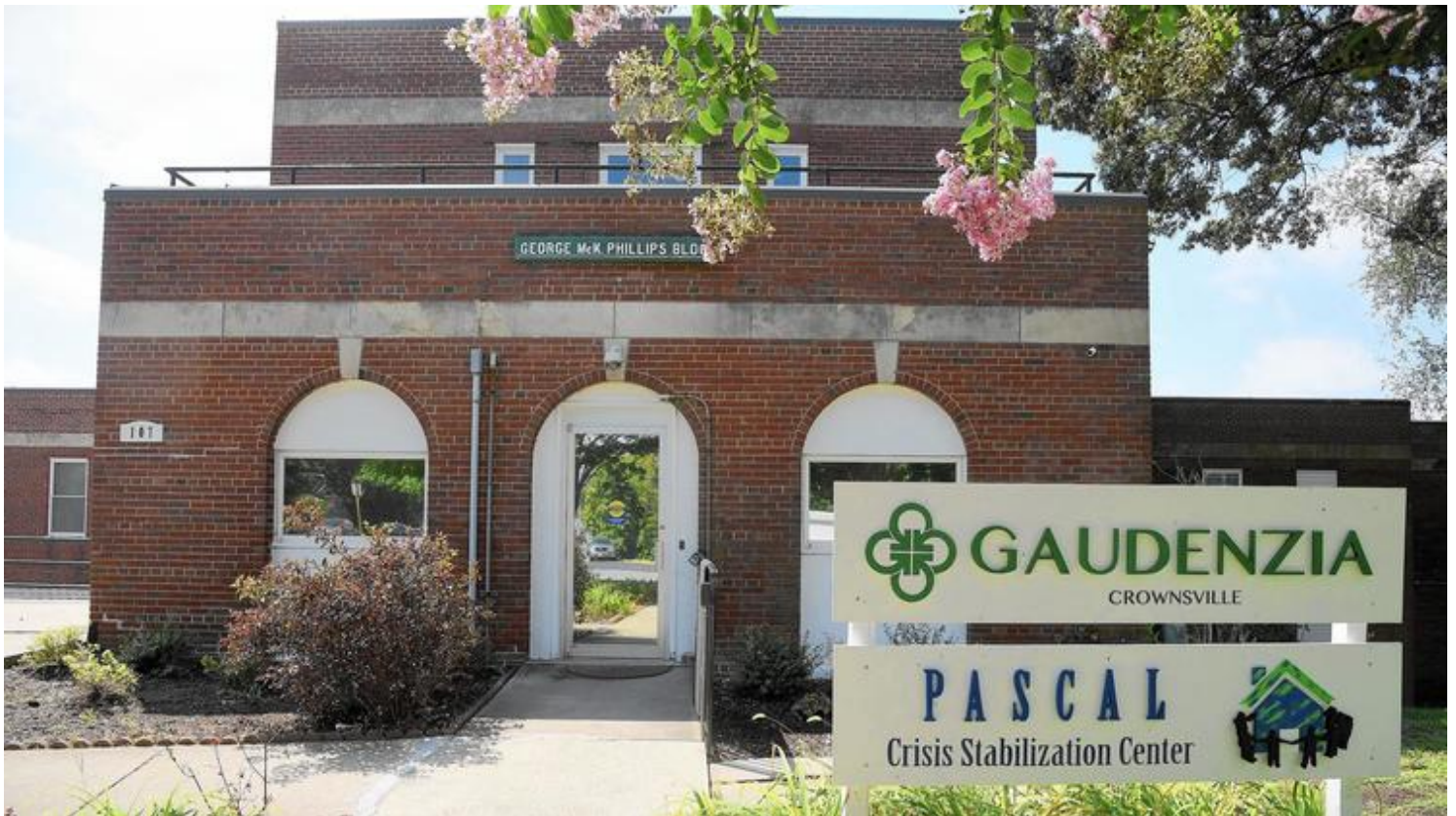


# Our say: Facility will improve response to overdoses



The sign in front of the Gaudenzia residential drug treatment facility in Crownsville. (By Paul W. Gillespie / Capital Gazette)

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Our say: Many hope new "stabilization center" at Crownsville will be a game-changer

APRIL 10, 2017, 7:34 PM

**T**he numbers on heroin and opioid overdoses can be overwhelming — and the latest signs indicate those numbers are still rising.

There were 319 overdoses in Annapolis and Anne Arundel County between Jan. 1 and April 5, a 45 percent increase over the same period in 2016. Thirty people died of overdoses in those four months. Altogether, from 2013 to 2015, 351 people died from drug overdoses in the county, making Anne Arundel No. 3 in this category in Maryland — ahead of far more populous Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

But later this month the county will be able to celebrate some good news. Robert A. Pascal Youth and Family Services is about to open a new "stabilization center" at the former state psychiatric hospital in Crownsville.

Many hope this will be a game-changer.

This is a joint venture between the nonprofit and Gaudenzia, which operates a drug and alcohol treatment center out of the same location.

The idea is to give police officers, often the first people on the scene of an overdose, another option besides putting those involved in jail, dropping them off at an emergency room or just walking away.

Officers will be able to take overdose victims to the center for an evaluation and guidance on the best course of action. The 5,000-square-foot, 16-bed facility will have mental health clinicians who can determine what level of treatment is needed, using emergency psychiatric assessment.

It is a similar approach to the county Crisis System, created to help police deal with people suffering severe mental health problems. That's not a coincidence, as the executive director of Pascal Youth and Family Services is Katherine Bonincontri, a former director of the Crisis System.

After initial evaluation, those brought to the center will spend five to 10 days there while clinicians and others determine how to best handle them as patients.

The center, which Bonincontri says is modeled on one in Texas, is indicative of the new approaches Maryland is taking to tackle the growing problem of heroin and opioid addiction and overdoses.

Funded in part by a \$225,000 grant from the Community Health Resources Commission, the new center will be designed to both focus on treatment for addiction and address the number of emergency room visits generated by overdose numbers. And the partnership between Gaudenzia, which moved to Crownsville last year, and Pascal Youth and Family Services could be a model for other counties to follow.

The center is expected to begin work April 24, and state officials will be looking at whether this new approach makes a dent in the region's opioid problem. Bonincontri and her team, the leaders at Gaudenzia and the state officials who approved this plan deserve praise for their vision in getting this started.

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