

GLOUCESTER, Mass. —Addicts in Gloucester who voluntarily surrender to police will not be charged as criminals, but sent for help, the police department announced in a Facebook post.

Calling opiate addiction a "disease," Chief Leonard Campanello said any addict who walks into the police station with their drug equipment or drugs will not be charged.

Instead, the addicts will be given details of a detox and recovery program and assigned what the department calls "an angel" to guide them through the process.

"I have arrested or charged many addicts and dealers," Campanello said. "I've never arrested a tobacco addict, nor have I ever seen one turned down for help when they develop lung cancer, whether or not they have insurance. The reasons for the difference in care between a tobacco addict and an opiate addict is stigma and money. Petty reasons to lose a life."

Campanello said he wants people to forget the stigma. Heroin addiction could happen to anyone. He said it's time to dry up the demand for heroin. "Heroin addicts can recover -- and we can help them," he said.

Two local hospitals have agreed to "fast track" the addicts to get them the proper care quickly.

The police department also announced an agreement with a local pharmacy that will provide Nasal Narcan, an antidote for an opiate overdose, without cost to those who don't have insurance. The city will pay for the cost with money seized from drug dealers.

"People are dying in crazy numbers," Christian Maki said. "Everybody deserves a chance because people get better." Maki is living proof. He has been sober for four years and newly married. A big change from being a homeless heroin addict for seven years.

"The heroin addict is no longer the guy under the bridge," he said. "The heroin addict, for the most part, is middle America. It's everywhere."

Maki calls the new policy changes a step in the right direction. "There's a chance this could work, and that's all that matters," he said. "If this saves one life, one family, that's all that matters."

<http://www.wcvb.com/health/gloucester-will-send-addicts-for-treatment-not-arrest/32814112>