Yavapai County Attorney Sheila Polk was among a group of individuals and agencies recognized by Arizona HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) for their work to reduce opioid misuse, abuse, addiction and death. The honorees, called the Arizona Opioid Response Group, received the award for Outstanding Prevention Effort on July 17, 2018, at the annual Arizona HIDTA Awards Ceremony. The group was formed in 2017 to bring together the different agencies and organizations working toward reducing the problems of opioids throughout Arizona and to coordinate a response. Over the course of two years, the group reviewed the science, data, and best practices to turn the tide of opioid abuse.

The group presented its inaugural educational event, the Opioid Summit, in 2017 in Phoenix with over 300 attendees. For some participants, it was their first time attending an event that featured both law enforcement and treatment providers in the same room. The agenda highlighted examples of cross-sector partnerships to address the opioid crisis. A second Opioid Summit was held in Tempe in early 2018 with over 400 attendees and a focus on problems such as neo-natal abstinence syndrome (drug-addicted newborn babies), untreated trauma, and the dangers of toxic counterfeit pills in our communities.

In announcing the award, AZ HIDTA Executive Director Dawn Mertz said: “The dedicated efforts of the Opioid Response Group are helping to bring a statewide understanding and more cohesive approach to a complex public health crisis.” County Attorney Polk stated she is honored to receive the award and to be part of the Opioid Response Group. She said, “We are so much more effective when we work across agencies, instead of in individual silos, to address community problems. I learn so much from others and believe that working together, we can improve lives while protecting public safety.”

The Opioid Response Group has expanded its partnerships for the next Summit, called the “Arizona Drug Summit: Uniting for Solutions.” This 2-day Summit will be held in Phoenix on September 24-25 and will focus on all substances of abuse. The Summit is sponsored by Arizona HIDTA, the Governor’s Office of Youth, Faith & Families, MATFORCE, and the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety. The public is invited to attend and can register at: http://www.matforce.org/Events.

In addition to Polk, the members of the Opioid Response Group who received the award include MATFORCE, the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Arizona, AHCCCS, the Navajo County Attorney’s Office, DEA, the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission, Sonoran Prevention Works, Community Medical Services, the Arizona Department of Health Services, and Shelly Mowrey of AZ HIDTA. (Photograph attached.)