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Opioid Command Center Hosts Medication-Assisted Treatment Summits, Increases Number of Providers Who Can Prescribe Buprenorphine

Harrisburg, PA – The Wolf Administration recently convened eight Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) summits across the state to promote awareness of MAT, share strategies for successful treatment and increase the number of health care providers using the federal waiver to prescribe buprenorphine in their practices.

“The substance use crisis is an ongoing battle and we know that all of our efforts point toward getting those with a substance use disorder into treatment,” said Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine. “Buprenorphine and other medications are essential parts of an individualized plan to assist those in treatment. Treatment works and recovery is possible for those with the disease of addiction.”

As a result of the eight summits, 84 individuals completed the first four hours of training to get their federal waiver to prescribe buprenorphine in an office-based setting. Those eligible for this waiver to prescribe and dispense buprenorphine include doctors, nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs). Under federal regulations, physicians are required to complete an eight-hour training to qualify for a waiver to prescribe and dispense buprenorphine while NPs and PAs are required to complete 24 hours of training.

“A key component to combatting the opioid crisis is ensuring that individuals have access to appropriate treatment methods,” said Drug and Alcohol Programs Secretary Jen Smith. “Having more waived health care professionals gives individuals in need another access point into treatment through primary care physicians.”

The Opioid Command Center partnered with a federally approved trainer to provide the waiver training to summit participants. The first four hours were provided in-person to summit participants with the remaining training via online modules.

The Wolf Administration’s work to address the opioid crisis focuses on three areas: prevention; rescue and treatment. The Opioid Command Center, established in January 2018 when Gov. Wolf signed the first opioid disaster declaration, meets every week to discuss the opioid crisis. The command center is staffed by personnel from 16 state agencies and the Office of the Attorney General, spearheaded by the departments of Health and Drug and Alcohol Programs.

Data shows that in 2018, more than 4,400 people died from a drug overdose. This represents a nearly 18 percent decrease in drug overdose deaths from 2017.

Efforts over the past four years, working with state agencies, local, regional and federal officials, have resulted in significant action to address the opioid crisis. Recent efforts include:

- Distributing nearly 7,000 kits of naloxone to Pennsylvanians in September 2019 and another 7,000 kits in December 2018.
- The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program has reduced opioid prescriptions by 30 percent and has virtually eliminated doctor shopping.
- The Opioid Data Dashboard and Data Dashboard 2.0 is providing public-facing data regarding prevention, rescue and treatment.
- The waiver of birth certificate fees for those with opioid use disorder has helped more than 3,400 people, enabling easier entry into recovery programs.
- A standing order signed by Dr. Rachel Levine in 2018 allowed EMS to leave behind more than 1,150 doses of naloxone.
- More than 6,000 health care professionals have been visited and provided training on how to prescribe opioids cautiously and judiciously.
- 813 drug take-back boxes help Pennsylvanians properly dispose of unwanted drugs, including 482,000 pounds of unwanted drugs in 2018.
- The Get Help Now Hotline received more than 29,500 calls, with nearly half of all callers connected directly to a treatment provider.
- The state prison system has expanded their Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) program, which is viewed as a model program for other states.
- More than 100 licensed physicians or prescribers have been disciplined for wrongful practice over the past two years.
- Several agencies have worked together to collaborate on the seizure and destruction of illicit opioids across Pennsylvania.
- The coordination with seven major commercial providers has expanded access to naloxone and mental health care, while also working to make it more affordable.
- Naloxone has been made available to first responders through the Commission on Crime and Delinquency, with more than 25,000 doses made available and more than 4,500 saves through that program. In addition, EMS have administered close to 29,000 doses of naloxone.

For more information on Pennsylvania's response to the opioid crisis visit www.pa.gov/opioids.

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