



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

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Governor Whitmer, Michigan Opioids Task Force announce efforts to combat opioid epidemic, cut opioid deaths in half

LANSING, Mich. – Today, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and other members of the Michigan Opioids Task Force announced a slate of steps the state is taking to combat the opioid epidemic. The state's strategy addresses three key areas: preventing opioid misuse, ensuring individuals using opioids can access high-quality recovery treatment and reducing the harm caused by opioids to individuals and their communities.

The state is announcing new actions in all three areas; the beginning of a multi-year blitz to cut opioid-related overdose deaths by half in five years. In 2017, Michigan recorded more than 2,000 opioid-related overdose deaths and more than 7,000 Michiganders have lost their lives to this epidemic in the last five years.

"We are losing more than five people every single day to opioid overdoses," said Whitmer. "This epidemic touches all areas of our state and is one of the greatest health crises of our lifetimes. My number one priority is protecting our families and our overall public health, and these efforts will help bring us closer to ending this epidemic."

The Michigan Opioids Task Force, created by Whitmer in August, held its first meeting last month to map out an action plan across state departments to meet this goal. The Task Force will announce additional actions in the coming months and conduct a series of regional townhall meetings to hear directly from individuals across the state about how the epidemic has affected their communities.

PREVENTION - \$1 million media campaign seeks to reduce stigma

To address the stigma associated with seeking opioid use disorder treatment, MDHHS is launching a \$1 million statewide campaign. Funded through State Opioid Response federal grant funds, the campaign focuses on changing the conversation about opioid use disorder treatment and encourages Michiganders to seek treatment to help improve their lives and ultimately prevent overdoses.

"We're asking for family members and peers of people with opioid use disorder to help us change the script about treatment and dispel the stigma around receiving recovery services for opioid misuse," said Robert Gordon, MDHHS director. "We want to change criticism to compassion; helplessness to hopefulness. We need to show every Michigander struggling with this medical condition that they are deserving."

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The campaign includes TV, radio, billboards, social media, paid search and mobile ads that will run through April 2020. The ads will direct people to Michigan.gov/Opioids, which will provide information about programs and resources available to Michigan residents from multiple state agencies.

With partners at the University of Michigan Injury Prevention Center, the state is also releasing a toolkit for medical providers on safer opioid prescribing practices. These comprehensive resources will help medical professionals make evidence-based decisions when prescribing opioids to decrease the risk of opioid misuse. The toolkit will be broadly shared with the Michigan medical community and is available at <http://michmed.org/optoolkit>.

TREATMENT - *Eliminating barriers by removing prior authorization for treatment medications*

To increase access to treatment for Medicaid recipients with opioid use disorders, MDHHS will remove prior authorization requirements for specific medications used to treat these disorders, including buprenorphine as of Monday, Dec. 2.

Prior authorization is a requirement that physicians must obtain approval from a patient’s health care insurer before prescribing a specific medication for or to perform a particular operation.

“Removing prior authorization for these medications in the Medicaid program eliminates an unnecessary barrier to treatment access for people who are struggling with an opioid use disorder,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health for MDHHS. “By eliminating this requirement, we will increase availability of treatment and increase their chances of a successful recovery.”

Medication-assisted treatment, combined with counseling or behavioral therapy, is the gold standard for treating individuals with opioid use disorder, leading to significantly better outcomes.

MDOC expanding medication-assisted treatment in Michigan prisons

More than 20 percent of incarcerated individuals in Michigan have been identified as having an opioid use disorder, and those leaving prison are 40 to 120 times more likely to die of an overdose within two weeks of release. To help address this issue, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) is beginning Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) programs in three facilities with a goal of expanding treatment to all its facilities by 2023.

Central Michigan Correctional Facility, Carson City Correctional Facility and Charles Egeler Reception and Guidance Center will be the first facilities to pilot medication-assisted treatment. The Women’s Huron Valley Correctional Facility will be added as a fourth site for the program, following the launch of the initial pilot. The facilities will offer methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone as treatment regimens for individuals in prison.

“Medication-assisted treatment, along with additional substance abuse treatment services increases the likelihood of long-term recovery, reducing the chance of recidivism,” said Marti Kay Sherry, MDOC acting administrator, Bureau of Health Care Services.

HARM REDUCTION - Syringe Service Programs expand across Michigan

To help reduce the amount of harm caused by opioid use disorder to individuals and their communities, MDHHS has expanded support for syringe service programs (SSP), which are now being offered by 25 agencies, up from 13 the previous year. This includes organizations in Detroit and Macomb, St. Clair, Genesee, Washtenaw, Ingham, Jackson, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, Ionia, Kent, Muskegon, Grand Traverse, Chippewa and Marquette counties, and several other counties. A full list is available at Michigan.gov/SSP.

MDHHS data highlights the impact the opioid epidemic has had on infectious disease transmission and demonstrates the need for SSP expansion. New diagnoses of hepatitis C (HCV) among adults less than 40 years old increased from 292 in 2000 to 3,774 in 2018, following similar patterns in accidental drug overdoses in the state. Where data was collected on HCV diagnoses among adults less than 40 years old in 2018, more than 80 percent self-reported a history of injecting drugs.

SSPs also offer referrals to substance use disorder treatment, distribution of the overdose reversal drug naloxone, collection of sharps disposal containers, providing sterile syringes, HCV and HIV testing and treatment, hepatitis A and B vaccinations.

For more information on the opioid epidemic and efforts being made by the state to address this issue, visit Michigan.gov/Opioids.

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