

DPH Announces Sustained Funding for Overdose-Reversing Medication Naloxone

Kara Odom Walker, MD

Secretary, Delaware Department of Health and Human Services

DOVER (Oct. 15, 2018) – Increasing access to the overdose-reversing medication naloxone has been a key priority for the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) as state and local partners work together to develop solutions to address the opioid epidemic. In support of that, the Department’s Division of Public Health (DPH) is announcing sustained funding for naloxone for first responder agencies statewide.

For the first time this year, \$100,000 in state funding was built into DPH’s budget to fund the purchase of naloxone. Previously, funding for naloxone was piecemeal, using funds from DHSS’s Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health and the Department of Justice’s State Law Enforcement Allocation Fund. In the absence of these funds, individual fire or police companies, or even county governments, scrambled for the resources to purchase naloxone.

To supplement the new state funds, DPH was just awarded \$538,000 per year for the next four years to purchase naloxone and support other programs for first responders. The funds come from a grant awarded by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

“We continue to lose too many of our loved ones and neighbors to the addiction epidemic,” said Governor John Carney. “Naloxone can give people a second chance to get medical care and be connected to resources to treat their addiction. This funding will allow more Delaware first responders to carry the medication and as a result save more lives.”

Data from the Department of Safety and Homeland Security’s Division of Forensic Science showed that 345 people died in Delaware last year from an overdose. So far this year, 226 people have died of suspected overdoses.

“Our goal is for every first responder to be carrying naloxone,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay, “from law enforcement, to campus security, from firefighters to ambulance crews. Previously, we were able to provide naloxone to law enforcement agencies on a limited basis. With both the state and federal funding now at our fingertips, we can greatly increase our distribution and saturation of this life-saving medication among agencies statewide.”

DPH’s Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS) coordinates the Naloxone Administration Program. Originally the program, which began in 2014, was available only to law enforcement. Currently 30 law enforcement agencies have signed agreements with, and received training through, OEMS to administer the medication as part of the voluntary program. In 2017, first responders (EMS and police) administered 2,861 doses of naloxone, compared to 2,341 in 2016.

DHSS Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker was present in June as Governor Carney signed legislation to expand the definition of first responders, enabling more of them – including police, firefighters, EMS personnel, lifeguards, park rangers, constables and security guards – to administer the medication to an individual whom the responder believes is undergoing an opioid-related drug overdose. Now with the expanded legislation, Wilmington Fire Department is also participating in the Naloxone Administration Program, and Secretary Walker hopes more will soon follow.

“We are so grateful for the support of our federal delegation in providing additional dollars to help us put naloxone in the hands of as many people as possible,” said Secretary Walker. “Equipping more of our trained first responders with this medication to reverse the life-threatening overdose gives us another opportunity to connect that person to the resources that will help lead them to a life in recovery.”

The legislation also extends liability protection for those mentioned above who administer naloxone in good faith, and maintains that liability protection for the lay person who provides emergency care in good faith as well.

Community access to naloxone has increased dramatically since 2014 when legislation was enacted making it available to the public, and in 2017 when Governor Carney signed additional legislation ensuring pharmacists had the same legal protections as doctors, peace officers and good Samaritans when dispensing the medicine without a prescription. Now many pharmacies have the medication and more friends and family members of those struggling with addiction are taking advantage of the opportunity to become trained on how to administer it in an emergency.

David Humes, of atTAcK addiction, lost his son six years ago to a heroin overdose. Humes continues to work toward increasing access to naloxone in the community. atTAcK Addiction was recently awarded a grant to do that from Highmark.

“In the aftermath of my son Greg's death I met with the investigating detective,” said Humes. “His words to me were, ‘If we had a 9-1-1 Good Samaritan Law or a naloxone law, your son might very well be alive today.’ In the ensuing days, I made a vow to Greg that I would somehow save a life in his name. The 9-1-1 Good Samaritan Law and community access to naloxone seemed to be the vehicle to honor that vow.”

Humes continued, “By expanding access to naloxone as widely as possible more lives will be saved. Thanks to the federal grant, countless lives will be saved over the next four years. atTAcK addiction is grateful to Governor Carney for including the initial funding in this year's budget, and to DPH and OEMS for their work in getting this grant. Hopefully the state will get additional federal grants to further fund community access to this life saving medication.”

Within three to five minutes after administration, naloxone can counteract the life-threatening respiratory depression of an opioid-related overdose and stabilize a person's breathing, which

buys time for emergency medical help to arrive. DPH recommends calling 9-1-1 immediately if you find someone in the midst of a suspected overdose, starting rescue breathing, and then administering naloxone. Naloxone is not a replacement for emergency medical care and seeking immediate help and follow-up care is still vital.

Information on community training of naloxone, along with resources regarding prevention, treatment and recovery, are available on HelpIsHereDE.com.

First responder agencies who have questions about how to join the Naloxone Administration Program can contact the DPH Office of Emergency Medical Services at 302-233-1350.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.

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