

A Word from the Guest Editors

Joanna R. Champney, MA¹ and Vishesh Agarwal, MD, EMBA²

1. Director, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Delaware Department of Health and Social Services

2. Chief, Addiction Services, ChristanaCare

Delaware's fatal drug overdoses have declined for the last two years (2% between 2022 and 2023 and 36% between 2023 and 2024), bringing the total to 338 drug deaths at the end of 2024. While we are gratified that our state's death rates have been reduced (mirroring the regional and national downward trend), now is not the time to lose focus.

It is within this context of progress that we curate this special issue on substance use disorder in Delaware. Health practitioners and policymakers alike remain focused on preventing addiction and overdose, enhancing screening, linking patients to care, creating program options that reach underserved people, and removing barriers to recovery.

This issue highlights the multifaceted efforts to build a robust and effective addiction treatment ecosystem in Delaware. At its core, substance use treatment is about acknowledging the dignity and worth in the people we serve and treat, and offering care and support that can help them recover and thrive. You'll find powerful examples of this in four featured programs in this issue: paramedics offering buprenorphine to patients after nonfatal overdoses, outreach to unhoused individuals, post-overdose response street outreach, and recovery housing.

We also explore the intersection of substance use and the justice system, exploring the effectiveness of programs that reframe addiction as a matter of public health concern rather than solely a criminal one. The public health system is also preparing for the onset of recreational cannabis being legally available for retail purchase this August, and this issue includes two articles dedicated to cannabis (both medical and recreational).

Furthermore, as our health system strives for parity in treating behavioral health, this issue also emphasizes the critical need for more robust addiction medicine training for medical students and residents. Discussions also include effective non-opioid pain management strategies and using effective patient engagement strategies in treating addiction.

Regardless of your role in responding to the overdose epidemic, we trust you will find this specially curated issue on substance use disorder to be both useful and informative.

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