



Gov. Rauner launches 24/7 helpline to combat opioid epidemic, help Illinoisans in crisis

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CHICAGO - Gov. Bruce Rauner today announced the launch of a statewide helpline to provide immediate assistance for those impacted by addiction to opioids and other



substances.

The helpline will provide a confidential outlet for individuals experiencing opioid use disorders, their families and anyone affected by the disease 24 hours a day, seven days a

week. Helpline specialists are trained in evidence-based approaches to help connect callers with treatment and recovery-support services. To reach the helpline, individuals can call 1-833-2FINDHELP.

“This helpline will provide a quick way for Illinoisans struggling with dangerous addictions to access resources, treatment options, and support,” Gov. Rauner said. “We are focused on helping them get on the road to recovery to combat further drug overdose tragedies.”

In launching the helpline, Rauner is fulfilling his promise to tackle the opioid crisis and combat the growing number of overdose deaths related to heroin, other opioids, and synthetics like fentanyl. Administration officials have been meeting throughout the year to establish an agenda to combat the epidemic. Rauner unveiled the Opioid Action Plan and signed Executive Order 17-05, creating the Opioid Overdose Prevention and Intervention Task Force this year. The task force was charged with building strategies that would help reduce projected opioid overdose-related deaths by one-third within the next three years.

Lt. Gov. Evelyn Sanguinetti and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Nirav Shah co-chair the task force, which was responsible for implementing new programs and policies.

“Our growing opioid epidemic is a national emergency that knows no neighborhood, no color and no class. It’s an equal-opportunity aggressor that is destroying lives,” Sanguinetti said. “I’m grateful our task force was able to meet the governor’s deadline to launch these programs and save lives. I’m excited to know the helpline is now available for people to take that important first step, and ask for help.”

IDPH data shows opioid overdoses killed 1,946 people in Illinois in 2016 — more than one and a half times the number of homicides and nearly twice the number of fatal motor vehicle accidents. In addition, data from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) estimates that approximately 248,000 Illinois residents need, but do not receive, treatment for illicit drug use.

“We live in a world where stigma prevents individuals from coming forward and asking for help. Treating opioid use disorder like any other disease is just the first step in combatting this horrible crisis. We also must make treatment accessible,” said Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary James Dimas, who helped get the helpline up and running. “It will never be easy, but with strong support and access to treatment through services like the helpline, we can help save these lives.”

The opioid task force has been traveling across Illinois to learn first-hand about the challenges communities are experiencing and ways the State can assist.

“We’ve heard about the successes of drug court and law enforcement safe passage programs. We’ve also learned about the challenges of longer-term follow-up care and continued support services,” Shah said. “The input we are receiving from health care providers, law enforcement, people affected by opioid use disorder, community organizations, and mental health professionals will help inform our efforts as we move toward implementing the Opioid Action Plan.

“We’re hopeful the new 24-hour helpline will connect people with the services they need and address some of the challenges communities face.”

Another policy established under Executive Order 17-05 was a Standing Order to make the overdose reversal drug Naloxone (Narcan) available to first responders and members of communities across Illinois, without a prescription. The order was issued by IDPH in October.

The Helpline for Opioids and Other Substances is funded by federal grant dollars that the State of Illinois secured from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Opioid State Targeted Response grant is administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse.

If you or someone you know is experiencing opioid use disorder, call 1-833-2FINDHELP.