

Pritzker Administration Announces \$13 Million Investment to Expand Access to Life Saving Medication in Opioid Crisis Fight

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CHICAGO — The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) announced today that it is making naloxone more readily available to reverse the effect of opioid overdoses impacting people across the state with opioid use disorder. IDHS is investing nearly \$13m aimed at fighting the opioid epidemic through expanding access to this lifesaving medication. Increasing access to Naloxone is one of multiple harm reduction strategies IDHS is utilizing to support people experiencing the disease of addiction and addressing record numbers of fatalities. In 2020, there were 2,944 opioid overdose deaths in Illinois, a 33% increase from 2019.

“Opioid overdoses have claimed the lives of too many Illinoisans, robbing friends, families, and entire communities of cherished loved ones. As part of the administration’s ongoing efforts to fight back against the crisis, I’m pleased to announce today that the Department of Human Services is expanding access to the life-saving medication Naloxone,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “With this \$13 million investment, the State is making it easier for those in need to get this medicine, providing medical providers with a critical tool that can help save lives.”

"These dollars will allow increased access to this lifesaving medication for people who are experiencing an overdose. Our priority at IDHS is to increase opportunities to save lives. As part of the State’s goals and objectives laid out in the State's Overdose Action Plan, we are making every effort to ensure this medication, that can make a difference for so many, is widely available. " **said Grace B. Hou, Secretary, IDHS**. “During COVID-19, we have continued to address the opioid crisis and feel confident that this action will help us strengthen our substance use programs to fight this epidemic."

These funds will support the work of providers across the state, especially organizations doing community outreach work to connect with persons who are at risk of an overdose, their friends, and loved ones. Funds will also augment the work of hospitals treating patients experiencing opioid overdose as they link patients with treatment programs in their communities.

This funding will also support first responders and other community partners in their efforts to widen the availability of the overdose reversal medication naloxone, commonly referred to as Narcan. The project will allow Illinois to increase its capacity to identify and report timely, comprehensive syndromic surveillance data on fatal and nonfatal opioid overdoses.

Expanding access to the medication is part of the State’s 2021 State Overdose Action Plan (SOAP). State agency workgroups and members of the Governor’s Opioid Overdose Prevention and Recovery Steering Committee reviewed and prioritized recommendations. Prioritization factors included determining what recommendations: (1) are most important and will have the greatest impact on reducing overdoses, (2) can be implemented now or in the near future, and (3) align with current State and/or agency strategic goals.

“Communities across Illinois have seen an increase in preventable fatal heroin/opioid deaths due to the raise in the availability of fentanyl, to increase access to a drug that saves lives is a smart use of taxpayers’ money. Naloxone is a miracle drug and like every household has access to a smoke detector everyone household should have access to this medicine, and this investment will help make that possible,” **said Representative LaShawn K. Ford (D-Chicago)**. “Gov JB Pritzker and Sec. Grace Hou should be

commended for their plan to combat the heroin problem in Illinois and for their ongoing work with community organization to help save lives in our state.”

“Investments made toward this treatment to combat the opioid crisis will save lives,” **said Senator Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago)**. “The ongoing epidemic has needed increased efforts for quite some time, and our state has seen a violent increase in overdoses over the course of the pandemic. This is a giant leap toward saving lives and changing the trajectory for drug treatment and prevention.”

“In DuPage County and all over the State of Illinois, we have been losing loved ones to the opioid crisis. Eliminating these barriers to obtaining Narcan are relatively simple fixes that can have an outsize impact on saving lives,” **said Representative Deb Conroy (D-Elmhurst)**. “Access to this medicine means a person who had an opioid use disorder and suffers an overdose can survive, giving them a new opportunity to conquer their illness and rebuild their lives.”

“Narcan is as essential as having a working fire alarm in your home. The overdose crisis is killing at least 10 Illinoisans or 250 Americans every single day. That’s more than car crashes, homicides, or suicides,” **said Senator Melinda Bush (D-Grayslake)**. “Thanks to IDHS expanding access, organizations like Live4Lali can distribute it to anyone anytime for free. Overdose is preventable and reversible. This is a huge advancement in our fight to save our lives.”

Naloxone is an opioid antagonist used for the treatment of overdose from opioids, such as heroin and fentanyl. In the U.S., the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) lists naloxone as a prescription drug. However, in several other countries, such as Italy and Australia, naloxone can be bought over the counter (OTC). The drug is completely safe and can be administered through a nasal spray, or with an intramuscular injection. The intranasal naloxone product, Narcan, can be administered by anyone (non-medical professionals), and friends and loved ones of persons using drugs are encouraged to have Narcan on hand. Organizations, wishing to order Narcan through this program, can go to www.dhs.state.il.us/AccessNarcan to begin the process.

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use, call the State's Helpline for Opioids and other Substances at 1-833-234-6343, text “HELP” to 833234, or visit HelplineIL.org.