

Gov. Pritzker Signs Legislation To Further Combat National Opioid Crisis

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CHICAGO – In an effort to further the state’s commitment to addressing the ongoing opioid crisis, Governor JB Pritzker signed several pieces of legislation designed to prevent overdoses and provide easily accessible treatments.

“Deaths from opioid overdoses are as tragic as they are preventable,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “By deploying harm reduction strategies and expanding drug-court treatment programs rooted in rehabilitation, we can save countless lives. Drug dependency is not a choice—it’s a disorder and should be treated as such. These bills mandate the tools, resources, and compassion necessary to help Illinoisans with substance use disorders while addressing the opioid crisis head on.”

“Fentanyl overdoses are killing far too many Illinoisans, as this synthetic, cheap, and deadly opioid is cut into everything from other drugs to diet pills,” said State Representative Will Guzzardi (D-Chicago). With the enactment of HB 4556, we can get test strips into the hands of any Illinoisan who needs one to detect the presence of fentanyl and prevent accidental overdose deaths. This bill will save lives, and I’m grateful to Governor Pritzker for signing it into law.”

“More people are dying of opioid overdoses in Illinois than ever before,” said State Senator Laura Ellman (D-Naperville). “Simply put, the more accessible naloxone is, the more lives will be saved. I’m proud to see this legislation become law.”

“This reform will help save lives,” said State Senator Robert Peters (D-Chicago). “We still have a long way to go, but removing penalties organizations face when they have access to test strips is a responsible way to address the opioid crisis and to create real public safety for all instead of continuing the misguided policies of the past.

“We all know someone who has a friend or family member that struggles with addiction — and the thought of that person losing their battle with opioids when lifesaving medication is available is devastating,” said State Senator Melinda Bush (D-Grayslake). “We must put an end to the red tape and hurdles people have to go through to receive naloxone so we can tackle the crisis head on.”

“If we want to take real action to help people suffering with opioid addictions, we have to remove barriers that unnecessarily penalize those looking for lifesaving help,” State Representative Deb Conroy (D-Elmhurst) said. “By updating pharmacy rules and how insurance charges for opioid antagonists, we will create greater awareness on how to respond to an overdose while helping more residents access the medication they may need to save their life.”

“Treatment courts are a critical tool in our menu of options to provide alternatives to incarceration in a way that holds people accountable while getting at the root causes of crime which are often addiction, mental health issues, and trauma,” said State Representative Lindsey LaPointe (D-Chicago). “These courts take a team approach to the court process by providing both supervision - through tight court monitoring - and services such as mental health and substance use treatment. I am proud to have

championed this bill, garnering bipartisan support, which updates our statutes in alignment with evidence-based practices."

Preventing Overdoses and Expanding Resources

According to the [Illinois Department of Public Health](#), in 2021, there were 3,013 deaths due to opioid overdose in Illinois, a 2.3% increase from 2020 and a 35.8% increase from 2019. The following legislative package is designed to prevent these deaths and provide resources to those who suffer from addiction.

Under Senate Bill 2535, pharmacists and those who prescribe opioids are required to inform patients of the addictive nature of the drugs and that the patient has the option to receive an opioid antagonist if they wish. This legislation is effective January 1, 2023.

Building on the state's \$13 million investment in 2021 to expand access to the lifesaving opioid suppressant Naloxone, House Bill 4408 prohibits insurers and Medicaid from charging a copay for the treatment, which is often expensive and inaccessible. This legislation is effective January 1, 2024.

Senate Bill 2565 allows circuit courts to implement drug-court treatment programs. The courts will also include additional harm-reduction services and allow a state's attorney to file motions to vacate and expunge convictions and records to people who successfully complete these programs. This legislation is effective immediately.

Under current law, testing supplies used to detect fentanyl are often classified as illegal drug paraphernalia. House Bill 4556 expands access for pharmacists and other health care professionals to distribute fentanyl testing strips to help reduce opioid overdoses and ensures the supplies can be stored without fear of prosecution in a licensed pharmacy, hospital, or other health care facility. This legislation is effective immediately.

Since day one, Governor Pritzker has taken action to fight the opioid crisis and save lives in every corner of the state. The State Opioid Action Plan allocates more funding toward mental health services, addiction treatment services, and children's family support services to effectively address racial disparities in responding to the opioid crisis. This enables Chief Behavioral Health Officer David Jones to spearhead the state's investment and support for those services and programs. Overall, the state's FY23 budget invested \$1.4 billion in mental health and substance abuse prevention programs, a \$600 million increase since 2019. In addition to these investments, the state offers robust prescriber education programs, numerous options for safe drug disposal, and a prescription monitoring system, designed to reduce opioid prescriptions and overdose death rates.

