

Delaware Opioid Prescription Rates Falling Seven Months After New Regulations Enacted

DOVER, DE –The number of prescriptions written in Delaware for opioid pain medications has fallen since the enactment of new prescribing regulations by the Department of State earlier this year.

Statistics from the Division of Professional Regulation, which licenses controlled substance prescribers, show a 12-percent drop in opioid prescriptions statewide compared to the first quarter of 2017. The number of Delaware patients being treated with opioid medications has also declined by 8 percent over the same time period, the division reports.

“Limiting the availability of prescribed opioids that end up being diverted, sold and illegally abused is an important part our fight to stem the tide of opioid addiction in Delaware,” said Gov. John Carney. “Opioid prescription rates remain too high in Delaware, but this is an issue we will continue to address in a comprehensive way.”

✘ The new regulations, which took effect April 1, were designed to help prescribers more closely monitor and control the use of opioids by their patients.

“A significant reduction in the number of pills being prescribed means a better chance that fewer end up on the street,” said Secretary of State Jeff Bullock. “Just as important, fewer people being prescribed opioids is a sign that medical professionals in Delaware may be changing their prescribing practices and relying less heavily on highly addictive opioids when better alternatives exist. Seven months into our new regulatory framework for opioids, we are seeing the results we had hoped for.”

Key elements of the new regulations are aimed at controlling the amount of opioids given to new patients and aggressively monitoring their treatment. First-time opioid prescriptions may not exceed a one week supply under the new rules. If further opioid prescriptions are deemed necessary, further action is required, including a physical exam with discussion of relevant patient history and the risks of opioids, and a check of the statewide Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) database. In addition, the state's new PMP Advisory Committee has begun the process of analyzing the practices of individual prescribers to ensure that they are following state laws and licensing standards.

"Although these are early results, they are encouraging," said Attorney General Matt Denn. "The Secretary of State and the Division of Professional Regulation deserve a lot of credit for putting these new regulations into effect – they placed Delaware in the top tier of states nationally with respect to requiring the responsible prescription of opioids."

The regulatory reforms complement efforts organized across state government and in cooperation with Delaware's community of public health organizations and anti-addiction advocates.

"Each overdose death in our state represents a life lost. Gone are the hopes and dreams of someone's child, brother or sister. We know that reducing the amount of opioids being prescribed is crucial toward saving lives and a key step in combatting the addiction epidemic," said Lt. Gov. Bethany Hall-Long.

The newly established Behavioral Health Consortium, created this year by the General Assembly and chaired by Lt. Gov. Hall-Long, is working to develop an action plan that will prevent and treat substance use disorder, expand and improve mental health treatment and recovery and provide support for family members of loved ones who are battling addiction or coping with mental health issues.

The state's Addiction Action Committee, also created by the General Assembly this year, is actively considering two other initiatives relating to the prescription of opioid drugs: possible legislation requiring health insurance coverage of alternatives to opioids for pain management, and possible state responses to the co-prescription of opioids and benzodiazapenes.

"We are grateful to the Division of Professional Regulation for enacting these new regulations," said Dr. Karyl Rattay, director of the state's Division of Public Health. "The bottom line is that precious lives will be saved by fewer people becoming addicted or having access to these dangerous drugs. We must continue our efforts to support safe opioid prescribing while ensuring individuals have access to alternative and more effective approaches to pain management."

The Department of Health and Social Services also has boosted resources to help individuals struggling with addiction. Educational materials about identifying and fighting addiction can be found at HelpIsHereDE.com. Individuals who are suffering from addiction can also call DHSS' 24/7 Crisis Hotline to be connected to treatment options. In New Castle County, call 800-652-2929, or Kent and Sussex Counties, call 800-345-6785.