

One year after new regulations issued, Delaware opioid prescriptions and quantities dispensed continue to drop

DOVER, Del. – The number of prescriptions for opioid medications in Delaware, as well as the total quantity of opioids dispensed, have dropped significantly in the 12 months since the Department of State enacted stricter prescribing regulations to help combat the opioid crisis statewide.

Statistics from the Division of Professional Regulation (DPR), which licenses controlled substance prescribers, show 14 percent fewer prescriptions for opioids were written by Delaware practitioners in the first quarter of 2018 compared to the first quarter of 2017. The Division also reports an 18-percent decline in the total quantity of opioids dispensed to patients over the same period.

“The opioid epidemic continues to ravage families across our state and our nation, but numbers like these show that the public policies we have put in place are having a positive impact,” said Gov. John Carney. “Health care practitioners in Delaware are partners in the shared effort to overcome this crisis, and we are seeing the results of changes in prescribing practices that will, without question, save lives across our state.”

The regulations, which took effect April 1, 2017, were designed to help prescribers more closely monitor and control the use of opioids by their patients. Six months after the regulations were implemented, statistics showed a 12-percent

drop in opioid prescriptions and an 8-percent drop in the number of Delawareans receiving prescriptions.

✘ “Fewer prescriptions written and fewer pills dispensed mean fewer chances for Delawareans to become addicted to opioids, or for these dangerous drugs to be diverted for illegal use,” said Secretary of State Jeff Bullock. “The regulations we enacted last year to put limits on opioid prescriptions seem to be working. We hope that in the long term these trends will mean a reduction in opioid addiction and deaths.”

Key elements of the regulations were aimed at controlling the amount of opioids given to new patients and aggressively monitoring their treatment. Except in special circumstances, first-time opioid prescriptions may not exceed a one-week supply under these 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.

Data collected through the PMP is being used to track prescribing trends, document the impact of state efforts to address the opioid crisis, and identify practitioners whose prescribing histories send up red flags so that further outreach may be conducted.

“This is very good news. We hoped when we saw the first drop in opioid prescriptions after the new, more stringent regulations went into effect that those numbers would hold. This new report shows that they have not only held but improved,” said Attorney General Matt Denn. “This is further evidence that the Delaware regulations strike a good balance between making opioid drugs available to those who need them, and ensuring that they are prescribed in a responsible way and with appropriate monitoring and follow-up. Secretary Bullock deserves a lot of credit for investing the time to implement

these new regulations, which will save lives.”

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

“There is no silver bullet for solving the addiction epidemic, but these new regulations give us one more tool to fight with,” said Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long. “Smarter prescribing practices undoubtedly save lives. As chair of Delaware’s Behavioral Health Consortium, I can promise we will continue to seek out approaches and use every tool we can to fight this epidemic and create stronger, healthier communities.”

The Behavioral Health Consortium, created last year by the General Assembly, is working to develop an action plan to 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 last year, is actively considering two other initiatives related 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.

“The regulations are an important component of the state’s overall plan to address the prescription opioid epidemic, and we are pleased to see the regulations are having the intended effect of reducing the number of prescriptions written,” said Division of Public Health (DPH) Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “DPH and the Safe Prescribing Subcommittee of the Addiction Action Committee continue to partner with DPR to increase awareness among prescribers regarding the regulations, safe

prescribing practices and alternatives 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; in Kent and Sussex counties, call 800-345-6785.