

# **Long Term Treatment Continues to be Need In Delaware's Struggle Against Opioid Crisis**

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With opioid overdoses and deaths continuing to increase, Attorney General Matt Denn on Wednesday released the Delaware Department of Justice's fourth annual report on the state's efforts to combat the epidemic and made recommendations for next steps.

"In the face of compelling evidence that the state's opioid epidemic persists, the state has made some progress over the past four years in addressing the epidemic, but has not significantly expanded treatment for Delawareans with substance use disorder," the report states.

The report details and heralds progress since 2015, including:

- statutory reform requiring admission to treatment facilities
- expanded prosecution efforts of drug rings
- legislation providing legal assistance for prematurely terminated insurance coverage
- state funding for first responders' use of naloxone
- state funding for assistance to individuals with substance use disorder in finding immediate treatment
- the announced creation of "START Centers" that will provide initial medication assisted treatment to patients
- \$3 million in one-time funds in the current budget for programs recommended by the Behavioral Health Consortium
- DOJ's civil lawsuit against manufacturers, distributors and retailers of opioids

"A few years ago we were saving very few people. That's not the case anymore," said Chief Kenneth McLaughlin of the Ocean View Police Department, who participated in the report's release. "While the process has been slow, resources are being mobilized at the local, state, and federal level to address substance abuse. While much more needs to be done, especially when it comes to prevention and demand reduction and the availability of long-term treatment, Delaware is making progress."

The report states "there remain just over 200 treatment beds (none of them for long term residential treatment) to help over 11,000 Delawareans believed to be struggling with substance use disorder." Recommendations from the report include:

**Expansion of sober living facilities:** Increases in state funding for sober living options, and an increase in the reimbursement rate for sober living facilities would likely increase "an economically efficient way for the state to

provide stable, supervised living environments for individuals who do not need the level of care associated with an inpatient residential treatment facility.”

**Expansion of inpatient residential drug treatment:** “The absence of long-term residential treatment is overwhelmingly the top complaint that DOJ hears from front-line treatment professionals, individuals seeking to address their own drug addictions, and families of those seeking treatment” and a DOJ recommendation to the Governor and General Assembly to use economic development funds to incentivize opening of new facilities was not adopted.

**Recovery high school program:** This initiative is for “high schools designed specifically for students in recovery from substance use disorder...The Red Clay School District has offered to make a building available for the operation of a recovery high school program in Delaware.” But it requires state operating funding.

**Prevention and alternative to opioids:** “The state’s Addiction Action Committee made a detailed proposal to the General Assembly for implementing such a plan, which included the elimination of private and public insurance barriers for physical therapy and chiropractic treatment, and a pilot state program to determine the short-term cost for the elimination of barriers to other treatments such as massage, acupuncture, and yoga.” However the legislation was altered before passage to eliminate much of the expanded treatment. DOJ recommends that the General Assembly enact the Addiction Action Committee’s original proposal. Additionally, DOJ recommends that patients receiving outpatient prescriptions of opioid drugs be informed of risks and alternatives and asked for

their informed consent when they receive their first prescription for such drugs.

**Opioid impact fee:** The report recommends that the General Assembly enact legislation creating an opioid impact fee, to be imposed on the manufacturers of opioid drugs in order to help remedy the harm those drugs have caused in Delaware.

“I want to be clear that as a state, Delaware has been very progressive and has instituted many first in the nation programs and laws. But, we also know that Delaware’s addiction and overdose death problem continues to escalate,” said David Humes, board member of the atTAcK Addiction advocacy organization. “We are in agreement with the Attorney General’s report that there are items that still need attention. Our opinion is that a recovery high school program for young people in recovery needs to be instituted. It can be done with a relatively small amount of funding.”

The full report can be found at <https://attorneygeneral.delaware.gov/2018-doj-opioid-report/>