

Scott Walker
Governor



DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

1 WEST WILSON STREET
PO BOX 2659
MADISON WI 53701-2659

Linda Seemeyer
Secretary

State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Telephone: 608-266-1251
Fax: 608-267-2832
TTY: 711 or 800-947-3529

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

On September 22, 2016, Governor Walker issued Executive Order #214 as a next step to recognize the growing opioid crisis and to call on the State Health Officer to issue an advisory bringing additional attention to the serious public health problem that has been created by the escalating opioid epidemic. We thank Governor Walker for creating a Task Force on Opioid Abuse to bring this critical issue to light.

This health advisory is being issued by the State Health Officer to inform the public of the alarming statistics of the current opioid epidemic in Wisconsin. The number of Wisconsin citizens who die as a result of drug overdose now exceeds the number of those who die from motor vehicle crashes, as well as suicide, breast cancer, colon cancer, firearms, influenza, or HIV. Opioid-related overdose deaths more than tripled in Wisconsin from 194 deaths in 2003 to 622 deaths in 2014. They are now a leading cause of injury deaths in Wisconsin. Prescription opioid pain relievers such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone contributed to about one-half of the total drug overdose deaths, and heroin contributes to about one-third.

Opioid abuse and drug overdoses have a devastating impact on individuals, families, and communities in our state. Wisconsin must acknowledge this impact and work together to address this public health epidemic.

The Department of Health Services and our partners recently used the Wisconsin Health Improvement Planning Process to identify health priorities for the state. Opioid abuse has been identified as one of these priorities. More information, including how you can get involved, can be found at: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/hw2020/wi-hipp.htm>.

In an effort to reduce death and disability from opioid abuse, Wisconsin is striving to:

- Improve the way opioids are prescribed to reduce exposure to opioids, prevent abuse, and stop addiction by implementing and strengthening strategies that help prevent high-risk prescribing and prevent opioid overdose.
- Promote the use of the prescription drug monitoring program, which gives health care providers information to improve patient safety and prevent abuse.
- Expand access and use of naloxone—a safe antidote to reverse opioid overdose.
- Expand access to evidence-based substance abuse treatment, such as medication-assisted treatment, for people already struggling with opioid addiction.
- Continue to enhance collaboration with other state and local agencies, health care providers, and other partners to develop strategies to reduce the devastation of opioid abuse.

This is a complicated problem which requires a cooperative effort of partners, organizations, and communities. Many are already working on efforts to combat this crisis, and we now ask for redoubled efforts and increased coordination. We are all in this together.