Maine Governor Signs Executive Order to Address Opioid Epidemic

February 19, 2019

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Maine Gov. Janet Mills has signed an executive order that aims to accelerate the state?s response to the current opioid epidemic. The drug crisis has caused more and more overdose-related deaths all over the country, and Mills says the executive order is just the first step in fixing a major public health concern.

?The time for action is now,? says Mills. ?In the past five years, at least 1,632 people have died from an overdose; more than the population of the towns of Chesterville or Eastport.?

The government plans to expand access to naloxone, the overdose medication also known as Narcan, by reprogramming the $1.6 million in state and federal funds. Mills has also prepared a financial order to train recovery coaches across the state, saying that the ongoing crisis warrants a swift response.

Last year, Maine saw a total of 418 overdose deaths. The executive order uses $1 million in unallocated federal grant funds to train 250 recovery coaches and assign ten more in hospital emergency departments. The state currently has more than 500 coaches, but not all hospitals have them or have enough to cover the entire day.

Earlier this year, Mills named Gordon Smith as the Director of Opioid Response to better control the situation. Smith says that the plan will distribute 35,000 doses of naloxone to hospitals and first responders. ?$600,000 of that is for purchasing Narcan, naloxone. The 35,000 doses are actually from a carryover general fund appropriation,? Smith said.

Gordon Smith is the former vice president of the Maine Medical Association. The Director of Opioid Response is a position created to tackle the epidemic that has claimed over 1,600 lives over the past five years. Mills and Smith said that their focus will be on medication-assisted treatment. They will also address the stigma of addiction. Currently, the stigma that addiction is merely a moral failure is one of the biggest obstacles keeping patients from the treatment they need. The Maine government will try to destigmatize the illness so that it can be treated like any other medical condition.

Mills has earlier said that she will take a different approach when it comes to the opioid epidemic, choosing to focus on treatment instead of law enforcement.

Last month, Mills began the implementation of the voter-approved Medicaid expansion, a necessary source of treatment funds. Smith expects that this expansion will improve treatment efforts, and that continued federal grants will be used for ongoing costs of addressing the epidemic.

"The medical community, I think, is fully onboard that the gold standard is medication-assisted treatment. The problem is that not all aspects of the population are on board with that," Smith said. Click here to see Dallas's top rehab placement programs.

?We have been looking at other states, and we have clear evidence from states that have expanded Medicaid that you do capture a population and prevent some of the problems,? says Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew.

Mills has not indicated whether her proposed two-year state budget will include increased state funds to address the crisis. However, she did say that she will propose lifting the 24-month cap on medication-assisted treatment for Medicaid recipients. This move will require legislative action.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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