House and Senate Budget Negotiators to Discuss Life-Saving Opioid Measures

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House and Senate budget negotiators will begin settling a wide range of spending differences in the annual state spending plan. They are expected to face major decisions about a series of potentially life-saving measures involving the opioid crisis in the process.

A six-member conference committee of Senate negotiators will try to convince their House colleagues to agree to a $5 million program aimed at reducing the death toll from the US opioid epidemic.

The Senate proposals stem from recommendations made this year by a high-level commission that explored possible new steps that the state government could take in order to reduce the opioid-related overdose deaths. It includes greater access to overdose-reversing drugs as well as ways to test for the presence of the very potent opioid Fentanyl. This specific approach stems directly from the recommendations made by the Harm Reduction Commission convened last year to study the issue.

Fentanyl is about 100 times more potent than morphine and is the cause of many deaths among patients taking prescription painkillers. It is also used illicitly by some people, making it even deadlier because

sometimes users are not even aware that Fentanyl is being cut into other substances, therefore increasing its potency. This is why Senators are taking aim at Fentanyl with the new proposals.

One amendment calls for a $150,000 pilot program that publicly offers test trips that can detect whether or not a drug contains Fentanyl.

Many activists are supportive of the measures, but they also warned that the limited action so far is still far behind where the state should be in its effort to save thousands of lives. Every day, an average of 130 Americans die because of opioid overdose, making this the worst drug crisis in US history.

?I'm glad we're taking this small step, but it's the first step,? said Aubri Esters, a member of the SIFMA NOW group that has advocated for greater action. ?Five million is absolutely nothing compared to what's necessary if we want to stop people from dying.?

In Massachusetts alone, opioid overdoses have killed more than 2,000 people each year since 2016. The state?s response to the crisis has been wide-ranging, including more than $147 million in spending on various programs involving intervention, treatment, and recovery over the past five years.

?In no way with any other crisis or any other medical disease would we be on hold if there are treatments that work. Nothing would be on hold if there was an outbreak of measles and mumps with 2,000 people dying in a state every year,? said Esters.

It should be noted that the $5 million proposals are only one component of several measures aimed at addressing the issue. However, it is far smaller in scale compared to the $48 million one-year spending increase Gov. Charlie Baker proposed to expand substance misuse prevention and treatment.

The latest effort, filed by Sen. Julian Cyr and approved unanimously via a budget amendment, is built around focusing not directly on stopping the use of opioids, but on ensuring that when it happens, it carries lower risks of disease and death?a significant change in approach.

The proposal calls for $1.5 million to expand a clean-syringe exchange program, allowing those who plan to inject substances to ensure that they are not transmitting diseases. It also includes a $300,000 plan to increase the availability of nasal Naloxone kits in emergency rooms, which can be used to counter fatal opioid overdoses.

Under the proposal, state regulators will have to ensure that Medicaid and insurance providers cover the costs of handing out the Naloxone kits to patients discharged from hospitals.

Another proposal adds $500,000 to support municipal bulk purchases of the rescue kits. This separate proposal was adopted by the Senate after it was offered by Sen. Eric Lesser.

The remaining funds will be used for another pilot, setting up new ?supportive places? across the state, where individuals can go after using drugs to be observed for overdoses and referred to treatment. Click the link to see Cincinnati's top rehab placement programs.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol 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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