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Gov. Wolf Provides Update on Opioid Epidemic Progress to PA Orthopaedic Society

Philadelphia, PA – Today, Governor Tom Wolf provided an update on the state’s progress in battling the opioid epidemic during the Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Society’s Fall Meeting and Symposium. Department of Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine joined the governor on the opioid panel discussion.

“Pennsylvania’s response to the opioid crisis has been called ‘a model for the nation’ by the American Medical Association,” Gov. Wolf said. “While accolades are nice, action and results are better, and we are pleased with the work and the results we’ve seen so far in this ongoing battle. While the state experienced a decline in overdose deaths last year, we have more work to do.”

Gov. Wolf signed a heroin and opioid epidemic disaster declaration in January 2018 to focus commonwealth resources and departments in a concerted effort to address this crisis. He has renewed the declaration every 90 days and the Opioid Command Center, created through the declaration, now involves 16 state agencies and the Attorney General’s Office with a focus on expanding efforts, listening to third party stakeholders and providers and breaking down government siloes to collaborate, idea-share, educate and develop new programs.

Dr. Levine focused on the state’s progress with the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, and drafting of opioid prescribing guidelines, both of which have led to more responsible opioid prescribing.

“Opioid stewardship is such an important part of the progress we have made in combatting the opioid crisis,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “Through resources such as the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, opioid prescribing guidelines and continuing education for physicians, opioids are being used more judiciously in the treatment of pain.”

The commonwealth’s initiatives Gov. Wolf highlighted during the panel include:

- Since 2018, more than 11,000 individuals have been engaged in warm hand-off through emergency rooms throughout Pennsylvania. Of those individuals, more than 6,000 individuals have been directly connected to treatment.
- The Wolf Administration worked with seven major commercial insurers to eliminate prior authorization for most forms of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and covering it on the lowest patient cost-sharing tier of the pharmacy benefit. The agreement also expanded access to naloxone and mental health care, while also working to make these services more affordable.
- Pennsylvania increased access to treatment by:
 - Waiving birth certificate fees for those with opioid use disorder, helping more than 3,300 people gain easier entry into recovery programs.
 - Expanding Medicaid, providing 125,000 more Pennsylvanians with coverage that includes substance use disorder care.

- Launching PA LEAD with Attorney General Shapiro, a collaborative law enforcement initiative aimed at connecting individuals suffering from substance use disorder with local treatment resources.
 - Expanding the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) program in Pennsylvania's state correctional facilities.
- The Get Help Now Hotline received more than 28,000 calls during the disaster declarations, with nearly half of all callers connected directly to a treatment provider.

Pennsylvania has received more than \$141 million in federal funding for its opioid response over the past two years. One of the unique uses of funding was to provide \$15 million for housing for those with opioid use disorder in high need areas, such as Philadelphia. By removing one barrier to treatment – lack of housing – the state can help people get and stay in treatment.

“From increasing access to care, collaborating with multiple partners, increasing access to and the use of naloxone, and many other thoughtful, innovative programs, Pennsylvania is seeing positive results,” Gov. Wolf said. “My thanks to the members of our Opioid Command Center for their tireless work in determining what needs to be done and then making it happen.”

More information on The Wolf Administration's action plan for battling the opioid crisis can be found [here](#).

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