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Wolf Administration Reminds Pennsylvanians of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Resources During the Holiday Season

Harrisburg, PA – Today, members of the Wolf Administration spoke in the state Capitol Rotunda to share resources and advice for individuals and families affected by mental health and substance use disorders (SUD) during the holiday season.

“This time of year is hard for many people and for varying reasons. During this holiday season, I urge all Pennsylvanians to be kind to one another and offer support to individuals battling SUD,” said Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) Secretary Jennifer Smith. “In doing so, we can give individuals the courage to seek the help and resources they need and so desperately deserve. Whether you are in recovery, seeking treatment for the first time, or need information on how you can help or support a loved one’s journey, there are resources available throughout the holiday season.”

DDAP maintains a toll-free helpline that connects callers looking for treatment options for themselves or a loved one to resources in their community. You can reach the Get Help Now helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). The helpline is available 24/7 – including Christmas Eve and Day and New Year’s Eve and Day. An anonymous chat service offering the same information to individuals who may not be comfortable speaking on the phone is also available at www.ddap.pa.gov.

“Remember your support system, and do not hesitate to use them if needed. If you are alone and cannot access your support system, the Get Help Now helpline can also be an ally,” said Secretary Smith. “Helpline employees are trained professionals who understand the sensitivity of an individual in a crisis and the complexity of the drug and alcohol system. They will remain on the line with the caller until treatment and resources have been identified and a warm handoff with a facility or provider has been made.”

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (or NAMI), extra stress, sentimental memories, or unrealistic expectations can lead to the holiday blues. One in five adults suffers

from a mental illness in America, with 64 percent of people saying they were affected by the holiday blues.

“The holidays can be a joyous time filled with families gathering together, celebrating, and sharing meals and special traditions. But with those responsibilities come added stress, so it is important to make time for yourself and take a break,” said Department of Human Services Secretary Miller. “If your feelings of stress, anxiety, or depression get to be too overwhelming, though, know that you are not alone. There is nothing wrong with seeking help when it is needed, and help and resources are always available.”

If you or someone you love is in crisis, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available by calling 1-800-273-8255. The hotline is staffed 24/7 by trained counselors who can offer free, confidential support. Help can also be accessed through the Crisis Text Line by texting “PA” to 741-741.

DHS also wants grandparents and aunts, uncles, and cousins who are finding themselves caring for children who lost parents or whose parents are dealing with the effects of the opioid epidemic to know that help is available via the KinConnector helpline. The helpline is staffed by Kinship Navigators – compassionate, knowledgeable social service professionals prepared to help families locate, understand, and access resources that may be able to help them during the holiday season. It can be reached by calling 1-866-KIN-2111 (1-866-546-2111).

Mental health services are coordinated at a local level by county mental health and developmental services offices. They can determine the appropriate program for an individual’s unique situation and needs. More information about these offices and their locations can be found at www.dhs.pa.gov. All of these resources have trained counselors available 24/7 to offer free, confidential support to someone in crisis.

The holidays may also be difficult for individuals in recovery, especially if they become stressed by changes to their schedule or daily routine, have strained or non-existent relationships with family members, or are faced with potential triggers while attending holiday parties and other celebrations. According to the Center for Disease Control, the most dangerous time of the year for substance use and alcohol related deaths are around the holiday months. The Wolf Administration encourages all Pennsylvanians to take advantage of the standing order to obtain Naloxone over the holidays.

“Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can reverse the effects of an overdose,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “Over the last year, we have held two successful naloxone distributions providing free naloxone kits to more than 14,000 Pennsylvanians. That means 14,000 lives can be potentially saved. We know that Pennsylvanians are dedicated to helping to save lives of not only their loved ones, but also anyone who has overdosed. The administration will continue to help individuals suffering from substance use disorder, because every life is worth saving, treatment works and recovery is possible.”

Families can support their loved ones in recovery by limiting their drinking or other substance use, properly disposing of old and unwanted prescription medication, and by creating a welcoming, safe, and compassionate environment for their loved one. This includes respecting what a loved one may or may not want to talk about, avoiding rehashing old problems, and being understanding if your friend or family member needs to remove themselves from a triggering situation.

For more information on treatment options in Pennsylvania, county-based resources, and the Wolf Administration's efforts to combat the opioid epidemic, visit www.pa.gov/opioid.

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