

NEW YORK
state department of
HEALTH

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.
Acting Commissioner of Health

Sue Kelly
Executive Deputy Commissioner

September 11, 2014

Dear Colleague:

The impact of opioid overdose is unrelenting. In 2012, there were 478 deaths in New York State in which heroin was involved. This is an increase of over 180 percent from only two years earlier. In that same year, there were 879 deaths that involved opioid analgesics. That is nearly 17 deaths per week. Although we do not have more current statewide data, the reports we hear from various programs and local health departments confirm what we read in the newspapers---that opioid overdose deaths, particularly from heroin, are still increasing.

In June 2014, Governor Cuomo announced a statewide initiative to combat the growing heroin and opioid epidemic gripping communities across the State. This initiative included enhanced capacity in the State Police to investigate narcotics trafficking; better integrating heroin and opioid awareness and response throughout the SUNY system; and an unprecedented effort to make naloxone, an antidote to heroin and pain medication overdose, more widely available. Because of the serious impact of opioid overdose on the lives of New Yorkers, the Department of Health, OASAS, and DCJS have collaborated to promote regulatory change, statewide training, and increased availability of naloxone, with an emphasis on putting it in the hands of all first responders including EMS, firefighters and police. State agencies are also committed to ensuring that families and friends of drug users, employees of drug treatment programs and other social service agencies staff who are likely to witness an overdose have the training and the naloxone necessary to save lives.

Since 2006, the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute has had a regulated program through which eligible registered providers—including not-for-profit community based organizations and regulated healthcare facilities—train non-medical individuals in opioid overdose recognition and provide these responders with naloxone. If your agency has substantial contact with individuals who are either at risk of having an opioid overdose or witnessing one, I request that you assess what role you can play in preventing unnecessary deaths. Registering with us to maintain an opioid overdose prevention program is an option that you can consider. Another option is partnering with opioid overdose programs in your area that are already registered. To find out where these programs currently are, please visit us at www.health.ny.gov/overdose.

Although we do not have funding to support overdose programs at the agency level, we would provide all of the naloxone necessary for maintaining a program as well as the technical assistance for initiating and maintaining it.

If your agency is interested in exploring this further, please send an e-mail to overdose@health.ny.gov indicating your interest as well as contact information for the person we should be speaking with.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Valerie White".

Valerie White
Deputy Director
HIV, STD, HCV Prevention and Administration
AIDS Institute