



Pew Charitable Trusts advises officials battling Delaware's opioid crisis

By NICK CIOLINO • FEB 12, 2019



Photo: Nick Ciolino

After about eight months of assessment, the Pew Charitable Trusts is making recommendations to Delaware's Behavioral Health Consortium on how to further combat the opioid crisis.

Pew's data shows Delaware had the nation's 5th highest overdose death rate in 2017 and less than half of the people in

the state who need treatment for substance abuse disorder receive it.

It also shows a lack of access to the opioid addiction medication buprenorphine.

According to Pew, only five of the state's 258 physician assistants have obtained a waiver to prescribe it.

Pew Charitable Trusts Senior Associate Jerin Philip calls Delaware "an interesting case" in that it has a more severe substance abuse problem than most states, but is also doing more than most to address the issue.

“It is disconcerting because it just highlights the challenge that still remains,” said Philip.

Pew is offering a series of recommendations. They include state funding to expand Delaware’s substance abuse disorder workforce, increasing the number of sites with medication-assisted treatment and greater reimbursement for the care coordination of substance abuse patients.

Philip notes another is creating a task force of insurers and employers. Its goal would be increasing access to substance abuse disorder treatment for Delawareans with private insurance.

“A task force hosted by the consortium where they can agree to a set of commitments that will help people get access to treatment,” he said. “So this will be a voluntary mechanism for the insurers to take leadership in developing best practices. ”

Lt. Gov. Bethany Hall-Long is chair of the state’s Behavioral Health Consortium. She played a crucial role in securing the partnership with Pew, which was announced in June of last year. She says she and her colleagues are pleased with the recommendations.

“I’m not worried so much about the funding as I am worried about making sure that we have the structure in place—the permanency,” said Hall-Long. “I’m really excited about it, quite frankly. I think we’re in a good place to be able to expand on that workforce component as well as our treatment expansion.”

According to Delaware’s Department of Safety and Homeland Security, the First State’s overdose rate likely rose for the sixth year in a row last year with 419 suspected overdose deaths in 2018.

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