



Wisconsin State Legislature

FOR MORE INFORMATION
CONTACT: LUTHER OLSEN (800) 991-5541

June 3, 2016

HOPE Agenda Improves Access to Treatment

Nearly 70 Americans die each day from overdoses of narcotic pain medication and heroin. As I explained in my previous column, the legislature has passed a series of bills in the last two legislative sessions to address this serious problem as part of the Heroin, Opioid Prevention and Education (HOPE) Agenda. In addition to efforts to better monitor the prescribing of narcotic pain medication that I explained in my first column on these efforts, the HOPE Agenda looked for ways to improve access to treatment for those addicted to narcotic pain killers and heroin. Three HOPE Agenda bills passed this session focus specifically on treatment. The need for treatment is clear. While heroin death counts in Wisconsin remained constant between 2001 and 2007, averaging 27 per year; that trend changed between 2008 and 2014. During that time, annual heroin deaths nearly quadrupled, from 70 to 267.

Last session, one of the HOPE Agenda bills expanded access to Narcan, an opioid antagonist, by providing access to first responders and allowing them to administer the drug. Narcan is a prescription drug that counters the effects of a heroin or opioid drug overdose. By expanding access to this drug, and others like it, fatal drug overdoses can be prevented. Due to the efficacy, safety and cost-effectiveness of Narcan, over 30 states have passed laws increasing access to it.

This session, the legislature approved Assembly Bill 427 (AB 427) which expands Wisconsinites' access to opioid antagonists like Narcan by offering the drug for purchase from certain pharmacies without a prescription. The bill allows pharmacies to obtain a standing order from a physician to allow pharmacists to dispense the drug. Normally, prescription drugs can

only be dispensed to the individual for whom the prescription is written. The pharmacist is required to provide a consultation that is in line with rules established by the Pharmacy Examining Board when dispensing opioid antagonists. According to news reports, both Walgreens and CVS have announced that they will provide Narcan to people in Wisconsin experiencing heroin or opioid overdoses.

The second bill approved by the legislature to improve access to treatment was Assembly Bill 659 (AB 659). Before this bill, opioid treatment programs were licensed both by the state and the federal government, but they had two different sets of regulations. For example, the federal government's licensure period for treatment clinics is three years, but state certification worked on a two-year cycle. This bill streamlined Wisconsin's state regulations to align with federal regulations, which will help remove bureaucratic red tape and make it easier for opioid treatment programs to expand.

Finally, the legislature approved Assembly Bill 657 (AB 657). AB 657 allocates \$2 million each fiscal year to go toward Treatment and Diversion (TAD) programs. These programs successfully keep non-violent offenders with alcohol or other drug problems out of jail or prison. In fact, approximately seventy-six percent of TAD participants do not commit a new crime after they participate in the TAD program. The individuals enrolled in the program receive the help and support they need in order to become and remain contributing members of society. TAD programs also save money by keeping people out of the criminal justice program. For every \$1.00 invested in TAD programs, the criminal justice system saves \$1.93.

Over the last two sessions, the legislature has worked to better monitor how narcotic pain medications are prescribed because of the connection between opioid pain medications and heroin use. In addition to more monitoring, the legislature approved the three bills discussed above to increase access to treatment. In my next column, I will talk about the third piece of the HOPE Agenda legislation that relates to oversight of pain management and treatment programs that use methadone.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us. You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.

#30#