

## Op-Ed: Combatting the Opioid Crisis on Multiple Fronts

Stories of opioid abuse and the tragedies that accompany it have become all too common across the country. We see them in the newspaper, on television, and in our communities. My colleagues and I are committed to fighting back. This week, the Wisconsin State Senate passed two bills that I authored with State Representative John Nygren (Marinette) – Assembly Bills 647 and 650 – that work to both prevent the abuse of these drugs and to help those who have been caught in the cycle addiction.

Assembly Bill 647 encourages collaboration to keep prescription opioids out of the hands of those who are seeking to abuse them. For the majority of people, their first encounter with an opioid won't be with heroin or a street drug; it will be with a prescription medication like oxycodone. It's important that we enable healthcare professionals, public health officials, law enforcement, and pharmacies to work together to keep prescriptions out of the hands of those who are seeking to abuse them. That's why the Electronic Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (ePDMP) exists – to foster that partnership. Assembly Bill 647 extends the sunset for this program and ensure that it will remain a useful tool on the frontline of the fight against opioid abuse.

While we're working to prevent prescriptions from being misused, we're also committed to helping those already struggling with addiction. Assembly Bill 650 reduces barriers to accessing opioid treatment by requiring the Department of Health Services (DHS) to provide access to peer recovery coaches as a benefit and to reimburse the cost for these services under the Medical Assistance program. Peer recovery coaches can play a vital role in individuals sustaining treatment. Shared life experience and the ability to meet people where they are make peer recovery coaches effective. It can be very compelling to be able to talk with someone who has experienced addiction and is a living testament to the power of recovery. This bill breaks down a barrier that stands between many people suffering with addiction and the treatment that they need.

These bills, which are part of the ongoing HOPE (Heroin, Opioid Prevention and Education) package of bills, have both received broad bi-partisan support in both houses of the legislature, and now head to Governor Evers' desk. We can all support protecting our communities from this crisis.