

**For Immediate Release**

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**Contact**

Julie Naughton, Communications and Legislative Services, 402-471-1695

[julie.naughton@nebraska.gov](mailto:julie.naughton@nebraska.gov)

Leah Bucco-White, Communications and Legislative Services, 402-471-9356

[leah.bucco-white@nebraska.gov](mailto:leah.bucco-white@nebraska.gov)

Cody Thomas, Nebraska State Patrol, 402-479-4985

[cody.thomas@nebraska.gov](mailto:cody.thomas@nebraska.gov)

## **DHHS Prescription Drug Overdose Prevention Update:**

### ***Agency Receives \$2 Million Opioid Response Grant and is Working to Promote Awareness/Access to Life-Saving Drug Used to Prevent Overdoses***

**Lincoln**—Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services received a \$2 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for opioid response. The grant, awarded to the Division of Behavioral Health, may be renewed in 2018 for the same amount.

"We know the consequences of prescription drug misuse and abuse can be devastating and Nebraska is not immune," said Governor Pete Ricketts. "The opioid epidemic is taking hold across the country, but we have an opportunity to be proactive, focus on prevention and treatment and raise awareness now to help stop opioid abuse from reaching crisis levels here."

The grant is part of the 21st Century Cures Act. States and territories were awarded funds based on rates of overdose deaths and unmet need for opioid addiction treatment.

"Sadly, opioid-related deaths are happening in Nebraska," said Courtney Phillips, Chief Executive Officer of DHHS.

"Our divisions are working together to address this issue head on. Prescription drug overdose prevention is an agency priority and the goal of our efforts is to help improve health outcomes and save lives."

SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment and Center for Substance Abuse Prevention will fund Nebraska's 2017 State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis Grant. The program aims to address the opioid crisis by increasing access to treatment, reducing unmet treatment need, and reducing opioid overdose related deaths through the provision of prevention, treatment and recovery activities for opioid use disorder (including prescription opioids as well as illicit drugs such as heroin.)

"This grant provides critical funding to provide targeted training on the complexities of opioid use and to invest in evidence-based prevention and treatment interventions. These solutions will arm Nebraska to prevent opioid abuse in our state," said Sheri Dawson, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health.

These efforts are part of DHHS' prescription drug overdose prevention initiatives which also include creating awareness about expanded access to naloxone, a drug that can be given to people experiencing an opioid-related overdose.

A law passed in 2015 allows health professionals to prescribe, administer, or dispense naloxone to persons experiencing an opioid-related overdose or to a family member or friend in a position to assist such individuals. The law also authorizes emergency responders and peace officers to administer naloxone to people experiencing this type of overdose.

DHHS is working with the Nebraska State Patrol to help provide naloxone to NSP drug investigators, evidence technicians and crime lab staff.

"Naloxone is a safe and effective antidote to opioid-related overdoses. It's a critical tool in preventing an overdose from becoming fatal," said Dr. Tom Williams, Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health for DHHS.

"The reason why naloxone is so important is because only a minute amount of some opioid drugs like fentanyl can have a lethal effect on those exposed," said Col. Brad Rice, Superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol. "Opioid-related deaths are at an all-time high nationwide and we are preparing ourselves to respond to an exposure event that may affect citizens and public safety personnel alike."

DHHS is also working with pharmacists, physicians and EMS providers to create educational resources and training on naloxone as well as an information campaign geared toward the public about access and use of the medication.

Fast facts about prescription drug use, abuse and deaths in Nebraska:

- In 2015, 149 Nebraskans died of a drug overdose, and at least 54 were opioid related.
- Data shows a slight increase in opioid-related deaths in Nebraska over the last decade from 2.4 per 100,000 people in 2005 to 3.0 per 100,000 in 2015.
- Nebraska's drug overdose death rate has also increased – 8.0 overdose deaths for every 100,000 people in 2015 up from 3.6 in 2004. The U.S. drug overdose death rate per 100,000 people was 14.7 in 2014 versus 9.3 in 2004.

DHHS already received just over \$3.5 million in federal funding to help advance opioid prevention. In addition to naloxone efforts, DHHS in conjunction with the Nebraska Health Information Initiative launched an enhanced prescription drug monitoring program Jan. 1, 2017 for health care professionals who prescribe and dispense medications. Now dispensed prescriptions for controlled substances must be reported to the PDMP and providers have access to patients' controlled substance medication histories. The PDMP is an effective tool that prescribers and dispensers can use to make more informed decisions for patient care. Additional enhancements to the PDMP are on the way. Starting Jan. 1, 2018, all dispensed prescriptions will be reported into the system.

DHHS and partners are also developing opioid prescribing guidelines and increasing provider and patient education.

Prescription drug overdose prevention is a priority in the DHHS Business Plan -

<http://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/BusinessPlan.pdf>.

Learn more about Nebraska's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program - <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/pdmp>.

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