



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

July 30, 2021

The Honorable Jake Corman
President Pro Tempore
Senate of Pennsylvania
350 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3034

The Honorable Bryan Cutler
Speaker
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
139 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2100

Dear President Pro Tempore Corman and Speaker Cutler:

As we are all aware, the national opioid crisis has taken a heavy toll in our commonwealth for over a decade, taking the lives of tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians. A record number (5,403) of Pennsylvanians died in 2017. That devastating number represents our family members and loved ones, neighbors, and coworkers.

My administration and the General Assembly have worked together throughout the crisis to raise awareness, pass legislation and take action that has saved the lives of individuals with opioid use disorder by ensuring access to high-quality substance use disorder treatment and supports. From overhauling the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), to instituting prescribing limits, to providing safe ways for more than 180,900 pounds of unnecessary prescription drugs to be responsibly disposed of, and increasing access to medication assisted treatment, our collective bipartisan efforts have had a significant impact on this crisis in our commonwealth. By working together, Pennsylvania saw a nearly twenty percent reduction in overdose deaths from 2017 to 2020. Information on the number of overdose deaths per year, as well as efforts to combat this epidemic, can be found on the [Opioid Data Dashboard](#).

In January 2018, I took the unprecedented step of declaring the crisis to be a statewide disaster emergency, and set up the interagency Opioid Command Center, made up of a consortium of state agencies. In the three years since declaring the emergency, I have renewed the disaster declaration fourteen times ensuring the opioid overdose epidemic remained a top priority for the administration. I write today to inform you of my intent to renew the declaration on August 5, 2021, and accordingly request consideration of an additional extension of this emergency by the General Assembly by August 26th. Enclosed, please find draft legislative language for your consideration to accomplish this request.

Since its inception, the members of the Opioid Command Center have worked together to reduce barriers to treatment, break down silos within government, and increase prevention and recovery efforts. We have worked together to equip over 1,200 first responders and public safety professionals with the skills necessary to administer more than 51,760 doses of naloxone and leave behind an additional 5,140 doses, reschedule fentanyl derivatives appropriately, allow pharmacies to deliver naloxone to additional types of facilities, develop a portal for organizations to directly request naloxone, broaden access to the PDMP, and support programs to help individuals sustain their recovery by providing necessary services like stable housing, case management, and employment training.

The Opioid Command Center has also collaborated on dozens of initiatives focused on priority populations including programming to support the unique needs of more than 400 veterans with substance use disorder where 98 percent of participants report a reduction in substance use and 88 percent report an overall improvement in quality of life, connecting more than 500 pregnant and postpartum women to substance use disorder treatment, and launching a 24/7 Get Help Now Hotline that has received more than 63,900 calls from individuals accessing substance use disorder treatment and resources.

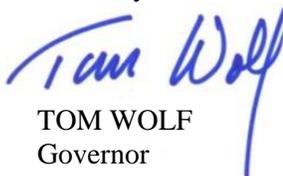
Over the course of time, most items undertaken originally utilizing the declaration authority have been effectuated through other means. For instance, some items have been addressed by different executive branch authorities. However, there is one specific item that, absent action by General Assembly, will not be able to continue via another separate authority if the declaration is not extended.

Since the inception of the PDMP in 2016, there has been a 56.5 percent reduction in the number of individuals receiving a dangerous drug combination of opioids and benzodiazepines, and a 40.4 percent reduction in opioid prescribing overall. When the declared emergency ends, the Department of Health will no longer be able to share additional information from the PDMP with sister agencies as permitted under the disaster emergency declaration. For example, this means that the Pennsylvania Insurance Department would not be able to access the PDMP to help monitor prescriptions to avoid overuse and negative outcomes of the claimants within the Workers Compensation Security Fund and Catastrophic Loss Benefits Continuation Fund programs. Many of the claimants of these programs have long term injuries managed by prescription drugs, a large percentage of which are opiates. I hope to collaborate with the General Assembly on a swift legislative solution, but in the meantime, I ask for consideration of an extension of the emergency so that we are able to continue this work without interruption.

The COVID-19 global pandemic is associated not only with mass death and suffering from COVID, intense economic hardship, and physical and emotional isolation, but with a heartbreaking increase in opioid overdoses nationwide – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports a 26 percent increase in 2020. Pennsylvania has not been immune to this trend – our overdose rate increased 16 percent in 2020. Based on preliminary data received by the Department of Health, 2020 had the second most overdose deaths reported behind 2017. This marks the most overdose deaths in a single year since the opioid disaster declaration was made in 2018. The experts tell us that there is massive lingering trauma from this pandemic that will continue to manifest itself in mental health needs, physical health needs, and substance use challenges.

It is for these reasons that I ask the General Assembly to consider returning to Harrisburg to extend the disaster declaration by August 26th to allow for a renewal of our collective efforts in this space and a continuation of this vital work.

Sincerely,



TOM WOLF
Governor

cc: The Honorable Kim Ward, Majority Leader, Senate of Pennsylvania
The Honorable Kerry Benninghoff, Majority Leader, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
The Honorable Jay Costa, Democratic Leader, Senate of Pennsylvania
The Honorable Joanna McClinton, Democratic Leader, Pennsylvania House of Representatives