



OPINION VIDEO:

Opioid Abuse Posing a Threat to Public Health and Safety in Delaware

April 14, 2017 – In this commentary, State Rep. Ruth Briggs King (R-Georgetown) discusses Delaware's opioid epidemic, its human cost, and what is being done to turn the tide.

[Click here](#) to see three-minute video.

Text of Message

Hi, I'm State Representative Ruth Briggs King.

Our nation has a drug problem.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 2000 and 2015, more than a half-million people died from drug overdoses. In 2015, opioid drug overdoses killed more than 33,000 people - a new high-water mark.

Delaware has not escaped the epidemic. More Delawareans die annually from overdoses of heroin and prescription painkillers than are killed on our state's roadways. The overdose death rate exceeds one person every other day. In 2016, over 308 fatal overdoses occurred. Sadly, over 353 babies were born with substance exposure in 2015 and the number almost doubled in 2016.

One problem is the pervasive nature of opioid drugs. They include prescription pain relievers like oxycodone, methadone, hydrocodone, morphine, and fentanyl, as well as illicit drugs like heroin.

An estimated two million Americans are abusing or otherwise dependent on prescription opioids. For those who cannot obtain prescription painkillers, heroin provides a cheaper alternative.

Some positive steps have been taken to turn the tide.

Many Delaware police officers now carry Naloxone, a drug able to reverse an opioid overdose. Last year, emergency responders in Delaware administered Naloxone to revive 2,334 individuals.



State Rep. Ruth Briggs King

Delaware has established a Prescription Monitoring Program - a database used to track prescription drugs dispensed to patients. Such systems have successfully limited unnecessary prescriptions; prevented "doctor shopping;" and identified patients in possible need of intervention.

Last year, our state created the Drug Overdose Fatality Review Commission to examine all opioid fatality cases and find ways to curtail this tragic toll.

And earlier this month, new state regulations went into effect regarding how opioid medications can be prescribed by doctors and requiring physicians to take additional steps if those guidelines are exceeded.

But a lot more needs to be done.

Nearly 40 million Americans experience severe levels of pain. Before turning to opioids, health care providers should first consider other pain management alternatives such as physical therapy and non-addictive meds and treatments.

Ensuring adequate insurance coverage for treating substance disorders, and enhancing enforcement of those preying on the addicted also need to be part of the equation.

Delaware's drug issues are not going away anytime soon. We need to continue seeking solutions to contain the problem, reverse the trend, and save lives.