



State Rep. Lyndon Yearick (center) and State Rep. David Bentz (left) were among the legislators at yesterday's signing demonstrating their support for the new bipartisan law expanding the availability of life-saving naloxone.

NEWS:

Law Removes Hurdle for Tool to Battle Opioid Overdose Deaths

JULY 21, 2017 – A CVS drugstore in Dover served as the backdrop for the signing of a new law that will help reduce opioid deaths in Delaware.

[Senate Bill 48](#) will expand access to naloxone, a drug that can quickly counteract the effects of an opioid drug overdose.

Opioid drug abuse -- ranging from prescription medications like fentanyl and hydrocodone, to illicit substances like heroin -- is a rampant problem throughout the nation.

In 2016, 308 people died from overdoses in Delaware, compared to 228 overdose deaths reported in 2015. Many of the deaths are attributed to opioid drug use.

The new law shields Delaware pharmacists who dispense naloxone against criminal, civil, and professional liability related to injuries or deaths connected to the drug's distribution. The statute will not apply in cases where the pharmacist caused the injuries or death willfully, wantonly, or by gross negligence.

According to Division of Public Health Director Dr. Karyl Rattay, opioids kill by fatally depressing respiration. She said the administration of naloxone can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose in as little as three minutes and stabilize a person's breathing.

In recent years, Delaware lawmakers have facilitated expanded access and use of the drug.

Three years ago, a law was enacted giving Delaware police agencies the ability to decide if their officers would carry naloxone. Another 2014 law allowed the friends and family members of people with opioid addictions to purchase naloxone with a prescription.

In 2015, the General Assembly passed a concurrent resolution that endorsed making naloxone more accessible in public schools.

According to state officials, naloxone was administered in Delaware 1,535 times in 2016 and 866 times in the first half of 2017. Its use is credited with saving hundreds of lives.

The law enacted on Thursday will make naloxone more accessible than ever.

"The practical effect of Senate Bill 48 is that naloxone will be available essentially over-the-counter following a brief training on appropriate use," said David Humes, member of the Board of Directors of atTACK addiction. "We recognize it isn't a solution to the opiate/heroin epidemic, but it gives a small sense of comfort and security to loved ones that have someone in active use."

At Thursday's signing ceremony, State Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Dover South, a supporter of the new statute, compared opioid addiction to a horrific rollercoaster ride



Gov. John Carney signed Senate Bill 48 into law at a CVS store in west Dover.

with no end. He said loosening the restrictions on naloxone will curtail opioid deaths. "By applying all the tools in the tool box, hopefully, this ride comes to an end," he said.

State Sen. Stephanie Hansen, D-Middletown, said saving the life of someone who overdoses is just the start of the fight, adding that she believes a continuum of services is needed to fully treat addicts.

Mr. Humes agreed with that assessment. "This [law] isn't the answer to the opioid crisis, but it is a very effective tool in stemming the deaths," he said. "First, we save the life. Where there is life, there is hope."

For more information on administering naloxone, accessing treatment resources in Delaware, or to learn about the signs of addiction, visit the newly updated Help is Here website at www.HelpsHereDE.com.

Call DHSS' 24/7 Crisis Hotline to be connected to treatment options. In New Castle County call 800-652-2929. In Kent and Sussex counties, dial 800-345-6785.