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## **Action plan provides framework to address state's opioid crisis**

SPRINGFIELD (Sept. 6, 2017) – Lt. Gov. Evelyn Sanguinetti, several state agency officials, stakeholders, and advocates today helped release the State of Illinois Opioid Action Plan. A coalition of state agencies has developed a strategic framework that outlines what Illinois needs to do to address the opioid crisis and why it needs to be done.

“The opioid epidemic knows no neighborhood, no color, and no class. It is not confined to alleys in urban settings, nor isolated in rural communities,” Lt. Gov. Sanguinetti said. “Illinois needs a comprehensive opioid strategy that destigmatizes addiction and appropriately aligns resources across state agencies in partnership with community priorities.”

Since 2013, the number of heroin deaths in Illinois has nearly doubled, and the number of prescription opioid deaths has almost quadrupled. Last year, there were 1,889 opioid overdose deaths, an increase of 76 percent from 2013. Recent analyses of death records in Illinois shows that overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids have increased more than any other category of opioids. The largest increase was in the number of deaths involving fentanyl, and drugs similar to fentanyl, which led to a tenfold increase in synthetic opioid overdose deaths between 2013 and 2016.

Earlier today, Gov. Bruce Rauner signed an Executive Order creating the Opioid Overdose Prevention and Intervention Task Force. The task force will look at strategies to prevent expansion of the opioid crisis, treat and promote the recovery of individuals with opioid-use disorder, and reduce the number of opioid overdose deaths. The task force will be co-chaired by Lt. Gov. Sanguinetti and Dr. Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health.

“The death toll continues to rise exponentially, and, if left unchecked, estimates show that more than 2,700 people in Illinois will die from opioid overdoses in 2020,” Dr. Shah said. “The opioid crisis is not something that can simply be solved with more treatment, increased prevention, or more arrests. It will take all of us, in all capacities to end the crisis.”

The goal of the plan is to reduce the anticipated number of opioid-related deaths by 33 percent in three years. The plan identifies three areas of focus: prevention, treatment/recovery, and response. To address those three areas of focus, the state has identified six priorities:

- Safer prescribing and dispensing of opioids
- Education and stigma reduction
- Data monitoring and communication
- Increasing access to care
- Supporting justice-involved populations
- Increasing naloxone access and use

“Years of scientific research on the effects of substance use on the brain show us that substance-use disorders should be treated the same way we treat other chronic diseases,” Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary James Dimas said. “In order to impact the opioid crisis, we need to work together to eliminate the stigma that accompanies substance use disorders and create a society focused on treatment and prevention.”

Andrew Dewey, a successful business man with a family who lost everything to heroin, can attest to eliminating the stigma and the importance of prevention, treatment, and ongoing support.

“I am a guy who is well dressed, clean shaven, and I am the face of heroin,” Dewey said. “It’s not what you think of. It’s not just the homeless guy on the street corner, but it’s also the daughter of a college professor, the nephew of an attorney, or the mom whose pain management with opioids turned ugly. If it were not for treatment, I would have been on a fast track to prison instead of being one year away from a master’s degree. I would have been in the system instead of a productive member of society. We need to work together to prevent others from following this path.”

Although the State of Illinois Opioid Action Plan is focused on reducing the number of opioid overdose deaths, working with and supporting individuals battling opioid-use disorder, and the people in their lives, is important. Recovery from opioid-use disorder is a long and difficult process, and may require lifelong support and access to care.

The opioid epidemic developed out of many complex and interacting factors over several decades, and it will require a great deal of sustained collaborative effort to turn the tide. The state will collaborate actively with other key stakeholders, including the Illinois Opioid Crisis Response Advisory Council, to build on the plan’s framework.

A copy of the plan can be found [here](#).

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