

Gov. Walker: Directs DHS to increase investment, improve access to treatment for mental health, substance use disorders

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Behavioral health rate increase builds on historic efforts to address mental health needs and fight the opioid epidemic

MADISON – Governor Scott Walker has directed the Department of Health Services to improve access to treatment for those battling mental health and substance use disorders by increasing the investment in behavioral health services. This morning, at the 13th Annual Mental Health and Substance Use Recovery Training Conference in Wisconsin Dells, Department of Health Services Secretary Linda Seemeyer announced an investment of about \$17 million, including \$7 million in state funding, to raise rates for professionals providing outpatient mental health and substance use disorder services.

“While we have made great strides in our efforts to help those living with mental health issues, or battling heroin addiction or prescription drug abuse, there is much more work to be done,” Governor Walker said. “The painful and heartbreaking stories of lives lost and families devastated due to untreated mental health issues, or substance abuse, or both, are evidence that we are still in crisis here in Wisconsin, and across the nation, and we will continue to be aggressive in this fight.”

“This increase builds on Governor Walker’s historic investment in mental health funding, and will fuel our fight in the battle against heroin and prescription drug

abuse, as well as other substance use disorders,” Secretary Seemeyer said. “This is a big win for patients and their families, as it will improve access to treatment, which is key to building a healthy, rewarding life.”

According to DHS, in 2016, 827 people died in Wisconsin of opioid overdose deaths caused by heroin, or prescription drugs, or both. From 2000 to 2016, the number of deaths in Wisconsin due to prescription opioids increased 600 percent, from 81 to 568 in 2016. Heroin overdose deaths increased 12 times, from 28 deaths in 2000 to 371 deaths in 2016.

According to DHS, advocates and partners, one of the most effective options available to address the statewide opioid addiction epidemic is to increase access to treatment for individuals with addiction and support the addiction treatment workforce.

“Approximately fifty percent of families are affected by a mental health or substance use disorder and these behavioral health concerns are even more prevalent among low income individuals,” said Joy Tapper, Executive Director of the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership. “Our local Community Health Needs Assessment, as well as the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership work plan, both identified access to mental health and addiction services as one of the top health improvement priorities. This investment will help improve access to outpatient care for Medicaid members, and is an important step in addressing the challenges we face recruiting and retaining providers in this field. The Partnership is grateful to the Governor, Secretary Seemeyer and the Department of Health Services for recognizing the gap in access and taking this action; along with the many other initiatives that have been advanced by the Administration to meet the behavioral health needs of Wisconsin residents.”

Effective January 1, 2018, Wisconsin Medicaid will increase reimbursement for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder treatment. This policy change will increase the maximum allowable fee for each covered outpatient service, and simplify the current rate structure, moving from five different fees per service to two fees per service. The new rates are competitive with border-state Medicaid programs and Medicare reimbursement, supporting growth of the Wisconsin provider workforce.

More information regarding the opioid epidemic in Wisconsin: Governor Scott Walker created the Task Force on Opioid Abuse in 2016 to address the state’s

opioid overdose epidemic. In addition to the creation of the DHS Opioid Abuse Prevention and Treatment Steering Committee, the Governor also directed DHS to issue a Public Health Advisory to increase the awareness of the situation and the efforts in addressing it. A special legislative session was called by the Governor earlier this year to consider recommendations developed by the task force, which is chaired by Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and State Representative John Nygren. To date, Governor Walker has signed into law 28 pieces of legislation under the HOPE (Heroin, Opioid Prevention and Education) agenda. #HopeActLiveWI

More information regarding mental health and substance use disorder investments in Wisconsin: Under Governor Walker, Wisconsin has made historic investments in mental health, including an increase of almost \$30 million for community mental health services, the largest increase in at least 25 years. This allowed for expansion of Comprehensive Community Services (CCS), a program that supports individuals of all ages living with mental health and substance use concerns at the community level. CCS is now available in 64 counties and three tribal nations. As of June 30, 2017, more than 5,200 individuals were enrolled in CCS.