

Gov. Evers: Announces Wisconsin to join the Bloomberg Opioids Overdose Prevention Initiative

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Bloomberg Philanthropies expands initiative to five new states, commits additional \$120 million to reduce overdose deaths in U.S.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers announced today that Wisconsin will be joining the Bloomberg Opioids Overdose Prevention Initiative. Launched in 2018 in Michigan and Pennsylvania, today's announcement is an expansion of the Initiative to Wisconsin and four other states, including Kentucky, New Jersey, New Mexico, and North Carolina. The expansion is joined by a \$120 million investment by Bloomberg Philanthropies with a \$10 million investment going directly to Wisconsin's efforts to combat the opioid epidemic over the next five years.

The Initiative is a partnership with the CDC Foundation, Global Health Advocacy Incubator, Johns Hopkins University, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Vital Strategies, and will draw upon learnings from Michigan and Pennsylvania to communicate best practices and create models that can be replicated across the country with a focus on medication access, equity, and local community engagement. The partnership will help scale existing efforts in the state, implement new programs, and advocate for federal policies to expand treatment access and harm reduction with a goal of accelerating progress in reducing overdose deaths. The state work will include funding for technical assistance, direct services, and embedded staff at government agencies and other organizations to support state and locally-led interventions.

"The coronavirus pandemic has only underscored the crisis we are facing in our state and country with the opioid epidemic, as opioid-related deaths last year exceeded 1,000 in a single year in Wisconsin for the first time," said Gov. Evers. "It's more critical than ever that we get folks support and access substance use treatment and mental health services. Wisconsin is thrilled to be joining this partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies as we work tirelessly together to save lives, expand treatment and services, and build a healthier state."

The Initiative is expanding at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has made the overdose epidemic significantly worse. Preliminary data of 2020 from the [CDC shows](#) the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a single year in U.S. history; more than 93,000 people died, representing a 30 percent increase from the previous 12-month period. CDC data also shows that 75 percent of these overdose deaths were opioid-related.

"The opioid epidemic can impact any family in Wisconsin," said Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. "Our partners across the state are saving lives and protecting residents in our communities every day from the harms of opioid use. We at the Department of Health Services are committed to doing everything we can to help. I'm confident this partnership, combined with ongoing efforts funded by state and federal dollars, will add important capacity and expertise to our efforts." Wisconsin has been implementing interagency responses to the opioid epidemic for years. This partnership will expand on the work the Evers Administration is doing to combat the opioid epidemic, such as the new pilot model of care in the state called the ["Hub and Spoke" model](#), as well as investing approximately [\\$47 million of American Rescue Plan Act funding](#) to increase community-level supports for people who have been grappling with mental health and substance use challenges. The Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) also operates the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. The PDMP is a database that health systems can integrate into their electronic health records. This puts real-time patient prescription histories at prescribers' fingertips as they are making decisions about opioids as well as stimulants, benzodiazepines, and other drugs that can lead to abuse. The PDMP also presents the prescriber information as state- and county-level visualizations that help policymakers better understand prescribing trends.

"Our PDMP has transformed prescribing practices in the state and has led to an overall decline in opioid dispensing since the PDMP was launched in 2013," DSPS Secretary Dawn Crim said. "This is an award-winning program that was designed for prescribers with input from prescribers. It is an important component of the Wisconsin opioid response, and it demonstrates the impact we can make when we invest in building smart solutions and continue to innovate as circumstances and technology evolve."

Today's announcement was made at the [4th annual Bloomberg American Health Summit](#)—an event of Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Bloomberg American Health Initiative at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health—which brings together experts and innovators creatively tackling some of the nation's most pressing public health challenges.