

# Reducing Overdose Deaths in North Carolina through a Statewide Standing Order for Naloxone

## Background

North Carolina faces a deadly epidemic of unintentional drug overdose. In 2014 our state had more than 1,000 overdose deaths, driven mostly by prescription opioid medications but increasingly by heroin. Between 1999 and 2014, the number of unintentional medication or drug overdose deaths increased by over 330 percent in North Carolina.

Naloxone is a safe, effective, non-addictive prescription medication that can reverse an opioid overdose; since August 2013, it has been used to reverse more than 1,500 overdoses in North Carolina. Widespread distribution of and access to naloxone is a key component in reducing overdose deaths.

In response to the epidemic of overdose in Pennsylvania, the state's Physician General signed a statewide standing order for naloxone in October 2015. Since that time, Maryland and New York City have implemented statewide and city-wide standing orders for naloxone, respectively. Further, the national pharmacy chain CVS is currently working to implement standing orders for naloxone in its pharmacies in many states, including in North Carolina.

## Challenges

Currently, the lack of a statewide standing order for naloxone in North Carolina presents several challenges:

- Family members may fear law enforcement repercussions and hesitate to report addiction issues or request a naloxone prescription from their health care provider.
- Individuals may not feel comfortable sharing that they have had an overdose with their health care provider.
- [Research<sup>1</sup>](#) shows that even after an opioid overdose, people are being prescribed more opioids, without an accompanying naloxone prescription.
- Some health care providers lack knowledge about the efficacy of naloxone and may be reluctant to prescribe it.
- Access to health care providers and other services is limited in rural areas of the state, making it difficult for many residents to obtain a prescription for naloxone (three more hospitals in NC closed in 2015; all were located in rural counties).
- Co-pay costs for a medical visit to obtain a naloxone prescription are a barrier – a statewide standing order would remove that step and its associated cost.
- Pharmacies, particularly independent pharmacies, do not necessarily have the time and resources needed to individually pursue standing orders.

## Conclusion

Establishing a statewide standing order for naloxone will eliminate many barriers to its access, increase its availability in communities across North Carolina, and ultimately, save lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Larochelle, M.R., Liebschutz, J.M., Zhang, F., Ross-Degnan, D., & Wharam, J.F. (2016). Opioid prescribing after nonfatal overdose and association with repeated overdose: a cohort study. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 164(1):1-9. doi:10.7326/M15-0038