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Advocates Urged New York State to Make History by Passing Bills to Ensure Universal Access to Lifesaving Treatment for All New Yorkers

Albany, NY: One day after the Senate passed two bills that will lay the foundation to universal access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to all New Yorkers--for those on [Medicaid](#), those with [commercial insurance](#), and those [incarcerated](#)-- people in recovery, family members who have lost loved ones to overdose, people with a history of drug use, drug policy activists, and elected champions gathered at a press conference to urge Speaker Heastie to pass these lifesaving bills. Speakers voiced how the overdose crisis is a kitchen table issue that affects constituents in every single New York State legislator's district, and how it is devastating Black, brown, white, rural, urban, and suburban communities across New York State. They focused on how passing these bills, which will ensure universal access to MAT to all New Yorkers, will be a precedent-setting victory for every Assembly Member and Senator in the state. And, how it will be a victory that will be shared with every family member who has lost their loved one to an overdose and the thousands of people with a substance use disorder who face barriers to accessing lifesaving treatment.

Being incarcerated should not subject any person to substandard medical treatment. Right now in New York, we have two tiers of treatment for substance use disorder, one for wealthy individuals who can afford the best private insurance and another for low-income individuals or those who are incarcerated," said **Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D/WF-Manhattan)**, sponsor of the legislation to require medication assisted treatment (MAT) in county jails and state prisons and to guarantee access to all forms of MAT for Medicaid recipients. "MAT is the standard of care and a path to wellness for those struggling with the disease of addiction. When more than 80% of all incarcerated individuals in New York struggle with SUD, it is our moral imperative to provide comprehensive access to lifesaving treatment."

"Every person deserves to be treated in a humane manner, whether they are incarcerated or not. New Yorkers that are incarcerated should have access to adequate medical treatment--especially in such a time when we are suffering through an opioid crisis," said **Senator Jamaal Bailey**. It is unfortunate that instead of rehabilitating those that suffer from drug abuse, in New York's prisons, individuals have been allowed to suffer on their own, often times leading to their death. I want to thank my leader and colleagues in the Senate for passing crucial legislation that will save many New Yorkers."

“New York must work to break down barriers preventing access to opioid treatment,” said **Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard N. Gottfried**. “We can stop arresting people for possession of syringes; stop insurance companies from blocking patient access through co-pays and treatment limits; and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to medication assisted treatment regardless of social or economic status. We can do this, and we can save lives, by passing these bills today.”

“From social stigma to regulatory barriers, people struggling with substance use disorder continue to face significant obstacles to treatment,” said **Assemblymember Dan Quart**. “For too long our response to drug addiction has been defined by criminalization and incarceration, while all along it should have been treated like a public health issue. This comprehensive package of bills is a crucial step towards guaranteeing all New Yorkers access to potentially lifesaving treatment.”

“It is estimated that more than 80% of prison and jail inmates suffer from substance use disorders and are in need of treatment. Without adequate treatment in correctional facilities, individuals struggling with opioid addiction face higher rates of recidivism and fatal overdose upon re-entry into the community.” said **Assemblyman David I. Weprin, Chair, Assembly Committee on Correction**. “At this moment we have a significant opportunity to remove barriers to Medication Assisted Treatment to avoid future tragedies in our correctional facilities and upon release; and I call on my Assembly and Senate colleagues to pass this package of Overdose Prevention Bills this session.

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz said, “The opioid crisis has ravaged communities all throughout the Bronx and New York State, and it is imperative that the legislature take action to ensure everyone has access to Medication-Assisted Treatment options. A few years ago, I passed bills to expand access to Naloxone - lifesaving medicine that can help reverse an active overdose - but it’s time to take another step forward.”

“Establishing universal access to medication-assisted treatment will save the lives of thousands New Yorkers. No one should be denied life-saving treatment due to inability to pay or restrictions set by insurance companies,” said **Assemblyman Adrew Hevesi**.

“Saving lives and aiding people along their recovery path is really what universal access to MAT offers,” said **Trish Herring, mother of Matthew Herring and member of FOR-NY**. “My son wasn’t given that opportunity while serving time on a drug related charge and he fatally overdosed 72 days after his release from prison. I applaud the Senate for recognizing the importance in providing people who are incarcerated the medical treatment they as human beings deserve, and urge the Assembly to pass these bill immediately.”

“Going through withdrawals in jail was the most horrific experience I have ever gone through,” said **Asia Betancourt Community Leader at VOCAL-NY**. “To the Senate, thank you for finally moving to save our lives. To the Assembly, we have your back--but you must have ours and pass these bills immediately; for me, for my twin brother who passed from an overdose, and for all communities across New York.”

“Although It has taken me a while to get behind this, we have already seen early success with our Medically Assisted Treatment program at our correctional facility,” said **Albany County Sheriff Craig D. Apple, Sr.** “I wholeheartedly support the expansion of these efforts along with the dedication of the much needed resources sought from our state leaders and would also encourage my fellow law enforcement leaders to support this as well.”

“The Drug Policy Alliance commends the leadership of the NYS Senate for passing critical legislation that will expand access to vital opioid overdose prevention resources,” said **Dionna King, Policy Manager at DPA.** “By removing prior authorization requirements for those insured through Medicaid and requiring that all NYS jails and prisons provide access medically-assisted treatment (MAT), individuals most vulnerable to fatal overdose have the means to access care. We hope that the NYS Assembly follows suit and passes these life-saving measures. As the overdose crisis continues to devastate communities we must insure that everyone one has access to effective treatment.”

“We applaud the Senate and Assembly passing A2904 Quart/S 4808 Harckham which eliminates prior authorizations for all MAT medications for commercial insurance policies,” said **Allegra Schorr, President of the Coalition of Medication Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates (COMPA).** “This will increase access to treatment and reduce barriers for delivering care.” She added, “We urge the passage of A7246 Rosenthal/S5935 Harckham which provides critical access to all medications to vulnerable Medicaid populations during this opioid crisis. Moreover, in order to ensure that all New Yorkers can access care, we urge the State to implement the policy outlined in A833 Rosenthal/ S2161 Bailey that would establish a patient-centered MAT program for incarcerated individuals in jails and prisons, and COMPA supports A972A Rosenthal/S4643A Harckham, which would prohibit copays during the course of treatment at an Opioid Treatment Program.”

“At Friends of Recovery-New York (FOR-NY), we hear time and time again stories of people involved in the NYS Justice System (in particular, incarcerated people), who did not receive medication assisted treatment (MAT),” said **Executive Director of FOR-NY, Angelia Smith-Wilson,** adding, “This lack of treatment and connection to treatment or recovery support services, especially for those involved in the criminal justice system, tragically often leads to overdose and death. MAT, which is a strong evidence-based treatment model, is shown to reduce cravings for opioids and is a proven pathway to addiction recovery. Because the current system is in need of improvement, FOR-NY fully supports this legislative package making MAT and treatment in general more accessible around the state and specifically for those incarcerated.”

“The Legal Aid Society enthusiastically supports A833A and S2161, which will finally require the provision of life-saving, necessary Medication Assisted Treatment in correctional settings, including the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision,” said **Prisoners’ Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society.** “There is simply no good reason why DOCCS fails to provide MAT to everyone in state custody. Even Rikers Island, marked by dysfunction and horrific conditions, manages to offer this critical treatment to our clients. But when those same clients are sentenced to state prison, all but a few of them are forced into painful detoxification, disruption of treatment, and a high risk of fatal overdose upon

release. As with every deficiency in the criminal justice system, this burden most heavily falls on communities of color.

MAT is the standard of care for Opioid Use Disorder, and it has been proven to improve health outcomes, reduce recidivism, and help people more successfully maintain active recovery. It's smart public policy, and it's a moral imperative in the midst of this national opioid crisis. The Assembly, Senate, and Governor must act now."

"The overdose crisis is devastating many of our fellow New Yorkers who are poor and have low-income," stated **Guillermo Chacon, President of the Latino Commission on AIDS and founder of the Hispanic Health Network**. "We've seen a death toll in 2017 alone are grim reminders of the impact of this crisis, with over 20,000 lives lost since 2010. We have the opportunity to place New York State as a standard of care provider for people with opioid use disorder. We will save lives and reduce overdose rates by ensuring universal access to Medication-Assisted Treatment for everyone that includes Medicaid recipients, private-insurance recipients and those who are incarcerated who have not had access to lifesaving medication. New York does better!"

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