
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 487 Session of
2019

INTRODUCED BY ISAACSON, PYLE, DiGIROLAMO, HOHENSTEIN,
BENNINGHOFF, BURNS, CALTAGIRONE, T. DAVIS, DEASY, DeLUCA,
EVERETT, FRANKEL, FREEMAN, GOODMAN, HARKINS, HARRIS, HEFFLEY,
HILL-EVANS, HOWARD, KAUFER, KORTZ, KOSIEROWSKI, LONGIETTI,
MALAGARI, McCLINTON, McNEILL, MERSKI, MILLARD, MURT, NEILSON,
O'MARA, PASHINSKI, POLINCHOCK, RAVENSTAHL, RIGBY, SAINATO,
SANCHEZ, SCHLOSSBERG, SCHWEYER, SNYDER, STAATS, STRUZZI,
ULLMAN, VITALI, WARREN, WEBSTER, WILLIAMS, YOUNGBLOOD AND
ZABEL, SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

A RESOLUTION

1 Designating the week of September 16 through 22, 2019, as
2 "Prescription Opioid/Heroin Epidemic Awareness Week" in
3 Pennsylvania.

4 WHEREAS, The heroin and opioid epidemic continues to be a
5 major, if not the most serious, public health challenge in this
6 Commonwealth and nationally; and

7 WHEREAS, In the early 1990s, prescription opioids became a
8 popular course of treatment for chronic and acute pain; and

9 WHEREAS, In 2010, the volume of prescriptions for opioid
10 painkillers peaked, making the United States the highest opioid
11 prescribing country in the world; and

12 WHEREAS, In 2010, an increase of 286% in opioid/heroin-
13 related deaths was reported; and

14 WHEREAS, Recent data indicates that approximately 80% of new
15 heroin users began their drug use with prescription opioids,

1 usually legally prescribed; and

2 WHEREAS, In 2016, the opioid crisis gained national attention
3 when the sharpest rise in opioid/heroin-related deaths was
4 reported; and

5 WHEREAS, Accidental drug overdose is now the leading cause of
6 death in the United States for individuals under 50 years of
7 age; and

8 WHEREAS, In 2017, according to the National Institute on Drug
9 Abuse, there were more than 70,200 drug overdose deaths in the
10 United States, with 47,600 of the fatalities involving opioids;
11 and

12 WHEREAS, In 2017, approximately 134 Americans died daily
13 because of accidental drug overdose, averaging 900 drug overdose
14 deaths per week; and

15 WHEREAS, In Pennsylvania, the National Institute on Drug
16 Abuse reported that in 2017 the age-adjusted rate of drug
17 overdose deaths increased by 16.9% from 2016 to 2017; and

18 WHEREAS, In 2017, health care providers in this Commonwealth
19 wrote 57.7 opioid prescriptions for every 100 persons compared
20 to the average nationwide rate of 58.7 prescriptions for every
21 100 individuals; and

22 WHEREAS, In 2017, Pennsylvania was ranked first in the nation
23 for absolute drug overdose deaths, losing 5,388 residents, many
24 of whom battled a substance use disorder; and

25 WHEREAS, Nearly every community in this Commonwealth has been
26 traumatically affected by the opioid/heroin epidemic, which has
27 transformed neighborhoods, left children without parents, torn
28 families apart and taken the lives of young adults; and

29 WHEREAS, Within this Commonwealth, the City of Philadelphia
30 has been hit hardest by the opioid/heroin epidemic, accounting

1 for one in five drug overdose deaths in this Commonwealth in
2 2017; and

3 WHEREAS, In 2017, Allegheny County experienced a record-
4 breaking 652 overdose deaths; and

5 WHEREAS, The opioid/heroin overdose crisis is not exclusive
6 to urban communities, as rural families and communities have
7 also been devastated; and

8 WHEREAS, The number of infants born with neonatal abstinence
9 syndrome has risen proportionately to the opioid/heroin
10 epidemic, with 3,354 infants exposed to drugs in the last 12-
11 month period; and

12 WHEREAS, This Commonwealth's foster care system has also been
13 impacted by the opioid/heroin epidemic, with 10,749 children
14 placed in foster care in 2016 because of parental substance use
15 disorder or opioid/heroin overdose; and

16 WHEREAS, The rates of HIV, Hepatitis C and other diseases
17 associated with injection drug use have increased in this
18 Commonwealth and nationwide; and

19 WHEREAS, In 2016, it was estimated that the total financial
20 impact of the opioid/heroin epidemic in this Commonwealth was
21 \$53.8 billion, including costs for health care and substance use
22 disorder treatment, criminal justice system costs and costs
23 related to a decrease in workforce productivity; and

24 WHEREAS, Costs associated with the decrease in workforce
25 productivity alone were estimated at \$1.1 billion; and

26 WHEREAS, In response to the opioid/heroin epidemic, the
27 Commonwealth instituted a variety of prevention and intervention
28 strategies to combat substance use disorder and accidental drug
29 overdose; and

30 WHEREAS, In 2016, the General Assembly passed legislation

1 directing the State's medical boards to develop regulations to
2 implement a curriculum for safe prescription of controlled
3 substances containing an opioid; and

4 WHEREAS, In 2016, the General Assembly approved legislation
5 which gives patients the right to complete a patient voluntary
6 nonopioid directive to refuse the prescribing or administration
7 of a controlled substance containing an opioid; and

8 WHEREAS, In 2016, the General Assembly also passed
9 legislation that limits the amount of controlled substances
10 containing opioids that can be prescribed to a minor, limiting
11 the amount in most circumstances to a seven-day supply; and

12 WHEREAS, The authorization of a "standing order" ensures that
13 individuals who are at risk of experiencing an opioid-related
14 overdose, or individuals' family members or friends, can obtain
15 naloxone, an overdose reversal drug, without a prescription; and

16 WHEREAS, In January 2018, Governor Tom Wolf signed the first
17 Statewide opioid disaster declaration, which provided for the
18 establishment of an opioid task force, created a team of
19 representatives from each State agency to find new, pioneering
20 strategies to combat the opioid/heroin epidemic and increased
21 funding for substance use disorder prevention, treatment and
22 intervention; and

23 WHEREAS, Single county authorities across this Commonwealth
24 have developed policies and procedures to ensure a "warm
25 handoff" of survivors of opioid/heroin-related drug overdose to
26 provide a simplified pathway from overdose to treatment and to
27 prevent relapse; and

28 WHEREAS, The Commonwealth's Prescription Drug Monitoring
29 Program provides prescribing practitioners further oversight in
30 regard to a patient's prescription history to better protect

1 patients' health and the safety of communities; and

2 WHEREAS, As a result of this Commonwealth's aggressive
3 approach to find solutions to the opioid/heroin epidemic,
4 preliminary data shows a decline in the number of opioid/heroin-
5 related overdose deaths in this Commonwealth; and

6 WHEREAS, A 12.5% decrease in overdose deaths was reported
7 between 2017 and 2018, while data from 2018 alone shows a 20%
8 decrease in opioid/heroin-related overdose deaths; and

9 WHEREAS, While this Commonwealth operates under the sixth
10 renewal of the opioid disaster declaration, robust programs and
11 funding should continue to be devoted to the most effective
12 prevention, treatment and intervention services for individuals
13 who continue to struggle with substance use disorder; and

14 WHEREAS, Efforts must be made to extinguish the debilitating
15 stigma that surrounds mental health and behavioral health,
16 including substance use disorder, which so often deters
17 individuals from seeking treatment; therefore be it

18 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives acknowledge the
19 devastating impact that the opioid/heroin epidemic has inflicted
20 on families, children, young adults and communities across this
21 Commonwealth; and be it further

22 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives continue to work
23 to find solutions to the opioid/heroin epidemic and the
24 prevention of substance use disorder; and be it further

25 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives continue to raise
26 awareness of the possible consequences of the misuse and abuse
27 of opioids, other controlled substances and prescription drugs;
28 and be it further

29 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives designate the
30 week of September 16 through 22, 2019, as "Prescription

1 Opioid/Heroin Epidemic Awareness Week" in Pennsylvania and
2 encourage all Pennsylvanians to remember and stand with
3 individuals, families and communities that have been impacted
4 adversely by the opioid/heroin epidemic.