

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Reaffirms Commitment to End the Opioid Epidemic, Releases Final 2020 Year-End Overdose Death Data

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*Governor Murphy Also Proposes Bill Package on Overdose Prevention and Recovery Resilience*

**TRENTON** – Governor Phil Murphy today reaffirmed his Administration's commitment to end the opioid epidemic through a comprehensive, data-driven collaboration across several state departments and also released the 2020 year-end statistics for New Jersey. Governor Murphy's comprehensive approach includes increasing access to evidence-based prevention and treatment programs in our communities, supporting individuals on their path to and maintenance of recovery, supporting data-driven work and strengthening system-wide infrastructure, and using robust law enforcement to stem the supply of illicit drugs. Governor Murphy acknowledged that the 2020 year-end data shows the loss of 3,046 New Jerseyans to suspected overdose deaths, closely comparable to 3,021 suspected overdose deaths in 2019, during a year impacted by the challenges and complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, Governor Murphy approached the legislature to move a bill package on overdose prevention and recovery resilience and pledged his commitment to working alongside Senator Joseph Vitale and Assemblyman Herb Conaway and key advocates. Among the legislation, one proposal aims to expand low-barrier access to naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal drug, by codifying widespread authorization for obtaining, administering, and distributing naloxone for emergency medical service (EMS) professionals and others. Increasing access to naloxone for individuals most ready to respond to an overdose emergency, including peers and other laypersons, is a key harm reduction intervention that will save lives.

Governor Murphy's Fiscal Year 2022 (FY2022) budget continues the Administration's commitment to support opioid-related programs including opioid use disorder treatment, drug diversion, harm-reduction services, and social supports. The proposed FY2022 budget increases funding to several key initiatives including \$6.8 million to end the prohibition on income assistance for those with drug convictions, \$1 million to expand harm-reduction services across the state, \$1 million to expand Overdose Fatality Review Teams, and \$1.3 million to implement a single license for integrated primary and substance use disorder treatment.

"Despite the complexities and burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, New Jersey averted a dramatic increase in annual suspected drug-related deaths," said **Governor Murphy**. "We are confident this is due to the strong foundation our Administration has built over the last several years. The unpredictability of the opioid crisis requires us to continue our pursuit of smart and compassionate policies focused on evidence-based solutions. We will not give up the fight against the opioid epidemic and we will not give up on the New Jerseyans who need us most."

"Even as New Jersey mobilized to fight the COVID-19 virus, we never lost sight of our ongoing battle to end the opioid epidemic in our state, or our commitment to assisting those struggling with substance use disorders," said **Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal**. "Together with our statewide partners, we took steps to expand access to treatment and recovery services during the height of the pandemic. Our efforts to ensure these therapeutic lifelines remained open undoubtedly helped us prevent a significant increase in drug-related deaths in New Jersey in 2020."

"Naloxone saves lives, and we will continue working to get it into as many hands as possible in as many ways as possible," said **New Jersey Department of Human Services Acting Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "We have worked during this ongoing pandemic to find new ways for residents to access counseling and treatment, and look forward to continuing our efforts. We're especially excited by the Governor's plan to end the prohibition on benefits assistance for those with drug convictions, as we've seen how this can be an obstacle to treatment. Improving access to treatment remains a top priority."

"As we reaffirm our commitment to saving lives and preventing overdoses, we are also cognizant of the ongoing social and economic impacts of the pandemic that have the potential to lead to increased rates of substance use and overdoses," said **New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli**. "To ensure there are resources for individuals, the Department has focused on making sure that there are multiple points of entry into the system, so that whenever someone is ready to make positive change on their journey, we are there to help them."

"The Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner continues to work tirelessly to respond to the overdose epidemic and produce timely suspected drug-related death data to better inform prevention efforts, despite increasing workloads that have resulted from the COVID pandemic," said **Dr. Andrew L. Falzon, the Chief State Medical Examiner**.

"Addiction, substance use and overdose do not occur in a vacuum, and neither should recovery," said **New Jersey Department of Children and Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "Through our work in child welfare, we know that caregiver substance use accounts for a majority of the foster care placements we make, but we can do better – we can keep families intact, engage kinship caregivers for temporary placements, encourage reunifications when possible and prevent further traumatizing children. This is an appropriate step that will incentivize recovery for the parents and keep children from losing a connection to a loved one, thereby decreasing their likelihood to turn to substance abuse to cope with unmitigated trauma and childhood adversity in adulthood."

"In 2019, Governor Murphy took the bold step of allocating \$5 million to NJDOL to launch the Pathways to Recovery Initiative which provided support and training to participants who have become separated from employment due to the opioid crisis," said **New Jersey Department of Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo**. "Due to this program's demonstrated success supporting workers and helping employers fill their business needs, I'm proud to say USDOL has awarded our department an additional \$9 million to expand this program, and we look forward to helping even more New Jersey residents affected by this epidemic."

"The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) remains steadfast in its commitment to partner with the Murphy Administration and agencies across the state on sustainable solutions to combat substance-use disorders," said **New Jersey Department of Corrections Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.** "Addressing the opioid epidemic starts at intake and is part of our multi-prong rehabilitative approach reducing recidivism, protecting communities, and ultimately saving lives. Over 3,700 individuals have participated in NJDOC's multi-faceted Medication Assisted Treatment Program that includes a peer navigator component educating inmates on the services available at intake and providing support with reentry. More than 1,300 individuals received Peer Navigator services with the program demonstrating overdoses reductions and increased adherence to treatment and recovery."

"The opioid crisis continues to take a terrible toll with lives lost to addiction and overdose and families suffering through the struggles of loved ones," **said Senator Joseph Vitale**. "Prevention, education and treatment are key to battling an epidemic that has claimed too many lives. I have worked for years to increase access to naloxone and medication assisted treatment because these are proven ways to prevent overdose deaths and provide for rehabilitation and recovery. I am excited to collaborate with the Governor on these initiatives. They will help break down barriers to life-saving medicine and improve access to effective treatment."

"Opioid abuse has destroyed families and devastated communities across New Jersey. Isolation and stress caused by the pandemic have only increased the potential for relapses and overdoses," **said Senator Joseph Lagana**. "As we work to address the broad impact of COVID-19, we must certainly also focus on treatment for and prevention of addiction."

"While our energies have been focused lately on combatting the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic, the opioid addiction crisis, and its accompanying overdose epidemic, have continued to take lives, and ruin families in New Jersey," **said Senator Nellie Pou**. "As a lawmaker who has sought to stem the tide of opioid dependency and deaths through targeted legislation, I stand with Governor Murphy in pushing new initiatives and creative policies that will strengthen our treatment network for those struggling with substance abuse. In addition, I applaud efforts going forward that will provide backup protections for families who have been so severely impacted by the scourge of addiction."

"With our state losing nearly 10 people a day to overdoses, it is absolutely crucial we address this issue on behalf of New Jersey residents," **said Assemblyman Herb Conaway**. "Increasing access to opioid antidote products such as naloxone, spreading more information about overdose prevention, and helping EMS respond to medical emergencies are some of the ways in which we can combat the opioid crisis that is so tragically pervasive in our communities."

"We cannot forget that even amid a global pandemic, we are still in the midst of another serious and oftentimes fatal public health emergency - the opioid crisis," **said Assemblyman John Armato**. "We've taken meaningful steps to raise awareness and advance prevention, including passing the nation's first opioid warning label law that I was proud to sponsor. However, there's still much more work I am committed to accomplishing in order to assist those struggling with drug abuse. Together we can save lives."

"Addiction is a complicated matter affecting thousands of New Jersey residents and the people who love them," **said Assemblywoman Gabriela Mosquera**. "Providing access to naloxone and sufficient social services are just some of the ways in which we can help prevent overdoses and address substance abuse throughout our state. Especially now that the stress of COVID-19 is exacerbating this issue, we must find ways to be there for the residents who need our help."

"For much of my life, I have borne witness to substance-abuse and addiction issues from which my loved ones and other people close to me have suffered," **said Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli**. "We now know that in addition to claiming the lives of over 500,000 Americans, the COVID-19 pandemic has induced a surge in calls to suicide and crisis hotlines; an increase in the sale and use of drugs and alcohol; and never-before-seen levels of drug-overdose deaths, especially overdose deaths involving fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine. The opioid crisis demanded our undivided attention before the pandemic. But it is more apparent now than ever before that we must continue implementing a whole-of-government approach to reducing drug-overdose deaths in New Jersey. It is imperative that we increase state funding for our overdose fatality review teams; harm reduction centers; physical and mental healthcare, including substance-abuse and addiction services; supportive housing; and social services generally."

To view the 2020 year-end statistics for suspected drug-related deaths, click here (<https://www.njoag.gov/programs/nj-cares/>).

To view the 2020 overdose death data dashboard, click here ([https://www.state.nj.us/health/populationhealth/opioid/opioid\\_deaths.shtml](https://www.state.nj.us/health/populationhealth/opioid/opioid_deaths.shtml)).

## Governor Phil Murphy

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