

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Releases Report on New Jersey's Response to the Opioid Overdose Epidemic During COVID-19 Public Health Emergency in 2020

05/27/2021

Governor Murphy Also Announces New Public Data Dashboard from the Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today released a report on New Jersey's response to the opioid overdose epidemic during the COVID-19 public health emergency in 2020. The report details the overdose mitigation strategies implemented over the course of Governor Murphy's administration that contributed to the resiliency demonstrated during the convergence the opioid crisis and the pandemic. Governor Murphy also announced a new public data dashboard from the Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner that will provide public health partners and law enforcement agencies with near real-time data regarding suspected-drug related deaths, enhancing their ability to rapidly address potential threats to the community.

Given the augmented risk for overdoses during the pandemic, New Jersey anticipated a substantial increase in annual drug-related deaths last year. Compared to 2019, New Jersey saw a slight increase in drug-related deaths, but did not see the anticipated dramatic surge of deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic experienced in many states across the country. New Jersey lost 3,046 lives to suspected drug-related deaths in 2020, compared to 3,021 suspected drug-related deaths in 2019. The 2019 cases have now been confirmed, the Governor announced, to be 2,914 lives lost to drug-related deaths.

New Jersey, was able to mitigate a drastic annual increase in drug-related deaths due to the foundation set by the Murphy Administration to end the overdose epidemic, which includes a comprehensive, data-driven collaboration across several state departments. Governor Murphy's comprehensive approach includes increasing access to treatment, especially medication-assisted treatment, harm reduction, and prevention programs; enhancing recovery supports, such as peer-recovery specialist programs; implementing robust law enforcement efforts to stem the supply of illicit drugs, such as initiatives to divert unused prescription drugs; and strengthening data-driven work and infrastructure.

"My Administration has prioritized ending the opioid overdose epidemic over the last several years which has strengthened our ability to save lives by preventing overdose deaths and connecting people to supports and treatment when they need it most," **said Governor Murphy**. "Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are confident that our comprehensive, data-driven approach prevented an acceleration in opioid overdose deaths. However, there is still much to be done in our fight against opioids. I will continue to work with our partners in the Legislature and look forward to signing a package of overdose prevention bills next month that will further equip those on the ground with the resources needed to tackle the opioid crisis."

"The fact that New Jersey avoided a dramatic increase in overdose deaths during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic is a testament to the powerful network we have built to combat the opioid epidemic," **said Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal**. "We know our fight to end addiction is far from over, but we're confident that continuing to pursue our proven strategies in education, treatment, and enforcement will help us support the residents of this State and reduce substance abuse."

"This report highlights New Jersey's tremendous efforts to address the overdose epidemic during the COVID-19 health emergency, a time when we have been particularly concerned about an increase in overdoses," **said New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli**. "State agencies have worked collaboratively to destigmatize the epidemic, advance evidence-based practices such as harm reduction, and create multiple points of entry for a person to get treatment and support when they are ready. The new dashboard will further inform our efforts, help us remain vigilant and respond in a timely and data-driven manner."

"All Medical Examiner Offices across New Jersey have experienced first-hand the tragic toll of the epidemic upon our communities, families and friends," **said Dr. Andrew L. Falzon, the Chief State Medical Examiner**. "The Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner is committed to doing our part to reverse the tide of the epidemic. This new dashboard is part of our commitment to release accurate and timely data of interest to the public."

"Last year was among the most challenging in our lifetimes, and we know that stress causes some individuals to be more vulnerable to addiction or relapse. Governor Murphy's Administration has remained focused on supporting individuals in their recovery with a comprehensive, wide-ranging strategy built around increasing access to treatment and prevention programs throughout New Jersey," **said New Jersey Department of Human Services Acting Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "We're committed to saving lives by

reaching those in need, removing barriers to treatment, expanding access to vital medication-assisted treatment, and distributing life-saving naloxone across our state. I continue to urge anyone needing help to call 1-844-ReachNJ. Treatment works, and recovery is possible. Together, we can keep saving lives."

"We're seeing an intersection of public health emergencies in New Jersey and across the country. Addiction disorders have been exacerbated by pandemic- and social justice-related concerns," **said New Jersey Department of Children and Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer.** "Governor Murphy's Opioid Initiative has infused crucial investments into DCF's robust community-based services, providing housing, social services and peer supports when addiction threatens the stability of the family, and providing help and hope that recovery can be achieved without the trauma of family separation."

"It will take all of us working together to stem this tragic epidemic, and we are pleased to be part of Gov. Murphy's multi-faceted, inter-departmental approach," **said New Jersey Department of Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo.** "We have learned from addiction research that one determinant of long-term recovery is a steady job; here at NJDOL, we are engaging with employers and creating opportunities for residents in recovery to return to the workforce, where they can again experience the dignity of work and, if desired, train to become peer recovery specialists."

"The New Jersey Department of Corrections remains committed to partnering with the Murphy Administration to address the opioid epidemic head-on," **said New Jersey Department of Corrections Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.** "Our cutting-edge medication-assistance and substance-use disorder treatment programs support reductions in recidivism rates, enhance public safety, and ultimately save lives."

To view the Interagency Opioid Working Group's 2020 opioid report, click here (https://d31hzlhk6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20210527/22/2f/f6/c6/860e131630d897a70b5235e0/Final_Opioid_Response_Report_2020.pdf).

To view the Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner's Public Data Dashboard, click here (<https://ocsme.nj.gov/Dashboard>).

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