



**Center for Rural Pennsylvania
Public Hearing
Heroin and Opioid Addiction Treatment and Recovery
August 18, 2015**

Good afternoon, I am Dr. Lauren Hughes, the Deputy Secretary for Health Innovation within the Pennsylvania Department of Health. I would like to thank Chairman Yaw, Chairman Wozniak, and the other members of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania for inviting me here to discuss two public health issues that are very important to the Wolf Administration and that Secretary Murphy is committed to address as priorities for the Department of Health. The first is opioid addiction and the significant increase in the rates of overdoses from both prescription opioids and heroin. The second is the rise in cases of Hepatitis C among injection drug users.

We have all heard the press stories in the past several months that have highlighted widespread and devastating effects of drug abuse in Pennsylvania. In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 2,525 drug-related deaths occurred in the Commonwealth. For that same year [name the group] in its report *Prescription Drug Abuse: Strategies to Stop the Epidemic*, ranked Pennsylvania as the 14th highest state in the country in drug overdose mortality rates. Although Pennsylvania has limited data available regarding drug-specific causes of death, the department has reason to believe that drug-associated deaths in Pennsylvania are largely related to prescription painkillers and heroin.

Recently, the CDC released a report detailing those individuals at risk for heroin addiction and strategies to respond to the epidemic. The most at-risk populations for heroin addiction are men, individuals without insurance, non-Hispanic whites, individuals with a history of the disease of addiction, residents of large metropolitan areas, and individuals aged 18 to 25 years. Individuals addicted to prescription opioid painkillers are 40 times more likely to become addicted to heroin. Strategies for responding to the heroin epidemic include preventing people from starting heroin, reducing heroin addiction, and reversing heroin overdose.

The Department of Health is dedicated to working collaboratively across agencies to address this epidemic and has already taken significant steps in several areas.

Pursuant to Act 191 of 2014, the Department of Health working with officials from other agencies and members of the legislature is establishing a prescription drug-monitoring program, also known as Achieving Better Care by Monitoring All Prescriptions. The ABC-MAP Board will closely guide the development and implementation of this program with input from an advisory committee of leading experts in PDMP best practices. Among other uses, this system serves as a tool for prescribers to identify addictive patterns in patients, refer them to treatment, and prevent future addiction to heroin. Under the guidance of a project manager, we are currently engaged in issuing a competitive bid to secure a software developer to build the tools needed to operate a PDMP.

A program such as the ABC-MAP is one of the ways that Pennsylvania will have a direct impact on decreasing heroin and opioid addiction and prevent deaths from these addictions

There is a second issue that is just as important, not only to the department but also to members of the legislature and specifically members of this board – that is the rise in Hepatitis C in the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania has seen a steady increase in the hepatitis C infection rate among younger Pennsylvanians aged 15-35 over the past several years, most notably among intravenous drug users. As a result, leaders from both sides of the aisle in the senate, most notable Senator Scarnati and Senator Hughes, have reached out to the secretary and she has met with each of them to discuss ways to address this issue. With their input and the input from various stakeholders, the Department started a project to create a hepatitis C resource guide for drug and alcohol counselors, friends and family members, and medical professionals to ensure individuals diagnosed are connected to appropriate care. The viral hepatitis prevention coordinator program initiated a collaborative effort with DDAP in 2011 to educate drug and alcohol staff and community partners about the hepatitis C epidemic in Pennsylvania. Currently the Bureau of Epidemiology has awarded 8 programs in the six State Health Districts mini-grants to support screening, education, and linkage to care.

The Department of Health recognizes that collaboration is critical to Pennsylvania's response to both the heroin epidemic and the rise in hepatitis C cases. We all must do our part. Beyond the PDMP and hepatitis C efforts, the DOH and its interagency colleagues are collaborating to develop prescribing guidelines and continuing health professions education, address barriers to quality treatment, and update addiction education in medical school curricula across the Commonwealth.

I would like to thank you again for inviting me to speak on these critical and important issues. I look forward to working together on strategies to improve the health of Pennsylvanians.

I welcome any questions you may have at this time.