

LEGISLATIVE REPORT



Newsletter
January 2023



NCAAR

*National Center for Advocacy and Recovery
for behavioral health*

State of the State Address: “One Death is One Death too Many.”



In Governor Murphy’s 2022 State of the State speech, held on January 10, 2023, Governor Murphy highlighted the slight decrease in reported drug related deaths in 2022, while acknowledging that “we are far from out of the woods. We are far from victory.” While every death lost is a preventable tragedy, every life saved is critically important. Thus, recognizing even the de minimus decrease in deaths is necessary. Conversely, as many have pointed out, the total number of drug related fatalities is not the most important metric when considering the irreparable damages being caused by the current drug epidemic New Jersey is facing.

More specifically, when we look at the makeup of the deaths, the inequities of New Jersey’s treatment system and disproportionate impact of our carceral response to mental health and substance use disorders is only further evidenced. **For example, a more in depth examination of the data reveals that black New Jerseyans and people over the age of 55 are “disproportionately affected” by the lingering problem of fatal overdoses, according to a State Police Capt. Jason Piotrowski, who heads the division’s Office of Drug Monitoring and Analysis. He further explained that. “In 2022, white people, who make up about 70 percent of the population, are expected to make up just over half of overdoses. Black people, who comprise about 12 percent of the population, comprise 28% of drug fatalities, the data shows. People over the age of 55 also comprise a growing share of deaths, nearly doubling from 16% in 2015 to 31 percent in 2022. You can’t have any optimism when you see this.” Capt. Piotrowski added.**

Governor Murphy also proclaimed that New Jersey is “leading in prioritizing youth mental health through comprehensive means that don’t just connect kids with resources but empower parents and educators to identify negative signs and provide positive support.” However, it was not clear exactly how New Jersey is leading the way. To the contrary, there is pending legislation that could make New Jersey a leader in this area, but that legislation is languishing in the legislature. For example, S2083/A2508 would require the New Jersey State Board of Education to include instruction on mental health first aid training as part of professional development requirement for public school teachers. Those bills were introduced on March 3, 2022 and February 14, 2022 respectively. These bills have not yet been posted in committee.

The lack of details on the ways New Jersey is planning on being a leader in mental health services and resources for children, is especially troubling in light of the fact in 2022, there has been an increase in the number of visits for mental health conditions in the emergency department at University Hospital in Newark, according to Dr. Virteeka Sinha, the medical director of the pediatric emergency department at the hospital. Even more troubling, not only have the mental health visits increased, the proportion of patients who actually need admission have increased even more, Sinha said. By providing mental health first aid training to teachers, they would become familiar with identifying mental health challenges and how to approach children and connect them with critical support. Early intervention increases positive outcomes for children with mental health disorders. This initiative would fulfill Governor' Murphy's description of New Jersey's leadership role perfectly, yet, it has not moved. Perhaps that is due to the overwhelming number of bills which are introduced by the New Jersey Legislature. In the 220th Legislature, 2022-2023, thus far, 8854 bills have been introduced or proposed but only an astonishing 154 or 1.74% were signed into law by Governor Murphy. 1.74% in light of the dire state of our citizens mental health is simply inadequate.

Victories...Victories...Victories

NJ Leads Country on Free Naloxone Access



In Governor Murphy's 2022 State of the State speech, held on January 10, 2023, Governor Murphy highlighted the slight decrease in reported drug related deaths in 2022, while acknowledging that "we are far from out of the woods. We are far from victory." While every death lost is a preventable tragedy, every life saved is critically important. Thus, recognizing even the de minimus decrease in deaths is necessary. Conversely, as many have pointed out, the total number of drug related fatalities is not the most important metric when considering the irreparable damages being caused by the current drug epidemic New Jersey is facing.

Homeless Shelters to Receive Free Access to MAT Services



Another extremely positive development is that people who are experiencing homeless in New Jersey will soon have immediate free access to medication for opioid use disorder via walk-in clinics hosted by two established emergency shelters in Passaic and Mercer counties. Through the novel program, the state Department of Human Services will provide both Eva's Village in Paterson and the Rescue Mission of Trenton with \$425,000 to shelter residents and visitors and provide critical treatment for opioid use disorder without the need for an appointment. This initiative will remove barriers to wellness, decrease inequities, and help the most vulnerable people access care.

Opioid Advisory Council Members Announced



Governor Murphy also recently announced 10 members of the public who have been appointed to the Opioid Recovery and Remediation Advisory Council. **A total of \$641 million in settlement funds will be paid through 2038 and will fund state and local programs focused on treatment, prevention, and other strategies to combat the opioid epidemic in the state. The state of New Jersey will be receiving over \$300 million of opioid settlement funds over the next 18 years.** New Jersey has a website dedicated to this, but it is rather sparse and lacking any real substantive information. New Jersey is one of 19 states where advisory committee will provide non-binding guidance, whereas in 14 states the advisory committee is vested with disbursing funds.

[Citations Found Here](#)

[DONATE TO NCAAR](#)

