

*Office of the Governor
State of North Carolina*

*Roy Cooper
Governor*



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Raleigh, N.C. 27699-0301*

July 28, 2017

The Hon. Chris Christie, Chair
Office of the Governor
State of New Jersey
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: President's Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and Opioid Crisis

Dear Governor Christie:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve on the President's Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and Opioid Crisis. Combatting the opioid crisis requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach and this Commission provides an opportunity for us to work together to help individuals, families, and communities across the nation.

At our first Commission meeting on June 16, we heard from individuals representing their own families or others who have experienced almost unimaginable devastation as the result of opioid use and misuse. They expressed the need for evidence-based prevention, intervention, treatment, recovery and support services to address this epidemic throughout the continuum of care. And they shared with us the urgent need for resources to make these strategies much more widely available.

Despite the persistence and determination of addiction counselors, advocates, law enforcement, first responders and others, a great deal must still be done to improve our collective response to this epidemic. I know you are well aware that drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, with opioid addiction driving this public health crisis. As a member of this important Commission, I believe it is imperative that the Commission prioritize the following items to stem the tide and stop this crisis:

Maintain and expand access to affordable and adequate health care coverage to all Americans

Increase availability of life-saving naloxone via first responders, community service agencies, treatment settings, and co-prescribing.

Expand federal, state, and local law enforcement partnerships to reduce drug trafficking and diversion

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Replicate the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program

Expand access to treatment, including recovery supports including peer-based recovery, and transitional housing support

Create a national approach for interstate exchange of prescription drug monitoring program information

I am pleased that in North Carolina, we have incorporated the above priorities into a comprehensive North Carolina Opioid Action Plan. The plan is the culmination of over a year of engagement with a diverse group of stakeholders collaborating to determine the best possible approaches for confronting the opioid epidemic head on. The plan calls for all levels of government and community organizations across the state to work together to confront the opioid epidemic on all fronts.

While the focus of North Carolina's Opioid Action Plan is on the state, it has important federal implications. No one agency can take on this fight alone. It will take coordinated efforts on the part of government agencies (local, state, and federal), community organizations, and private citizens.

I would also like to draw your attention to the enclosed letter I submitted May 15 to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Acting Director Richard Baum. In this letter, I focused on the importance of prioritizing:

Prevention – four in five heroin users started out by misusing prescription opioids. Ending the opioid crisis starts with prevention, which includes safe prescribing, patient education, and community awareness.

Rescue – continued support of expanded availability of naloxone, including price reductions and expanded access by law enforcement agencies and first responders.

Treatment – evidence shows that medication-assisted treatment works. It is vital that we identify barriers to MAT and increase funding for states to expand treatment capacity.

Recovery – develop a model discharge and recovery plan to promote recovery services for patients with opioid use disorders.

These priorities are part of the Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention (STOP) Act that recently passed the North Carolina General Assembly and I signed into law. The STOP act tightens prescribing and dispensing policies, requiring prescribers and pharmacies to use our drug monitoring program and placing five or seven day limits on initial prescriptions for acute pain. The legislation directs \$5 million each year of the biennium towards community-based substance use treatment. We envision this to work together with the Opioid funding from CURES. It also renews North Carolina's commitment to reversing overdoses and saving lives by providing standing orders for naloxone to be distributed by law enforcement, local health departments, and community health groups. Working with these groups, the state is also maximizing the impact of a \$31 million 21st Century Cures Act grant received in May of this year.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, I must reiterate that affordable and quality health care coverage is vital to the success of our efforts to put an end to the opioid epidemic. Federal health care

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legislation that includes drastic cuts to Medicaid spending and leaves tens of millions of Americans without health care coverage will jeopardize our efforts to stem the opioid crisis, and will make our citizens less healthy and less safe. We must work to increase - not decrease - access to treatment, and quality, affordable health care coverage is the most essential ingredient.

Opioid misuse is a complex problem with devastating impacts on families and communities across our county. It affects all of us in our workplaces, our places of worship, throughout our everyday lives, all while costing billions of dollars for North Carolina and the entire nation. A problem so far reaching demands a comprehensive solution, and this commission has been charged with developing a path toward that solution on the federal level. To successfully combat this opioid misuse, we must collaborate and coordinate at all levels of government, and nothing short of our unwavering and sustained commitment will suffice.

I look forward to our continued collaboration on this important issue, and to the commission's upcoming draft report.

With kind regards, I am

Very truly yours,



Roy Cooper

cc: Governor Charlie Baker
Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy
Professor Bertha Madras, Ph.D.
Richard J. Baum, Acting Director, ONDCP