

**Testimony on the Proposed
Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Budget**

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House Appropriations Committee

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Thank you, Chairman Saylor, Chairman Bradford and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony on Governor Wolf's proposed 2019-2020 budget for the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP or the department).

As many of you know, Pennsylvania continues to battle the opioid crisis that has taken far too many lives in recent years. Tackling a crisis of this magnitude requires identifying and addressing the most critical needs first. The department, along with the Governor's Office and support from our sister agencies, has made great strides over the last year in addressing the critical needs of reducing overdose deaths and improving access to critical treatment services. We've focused time and resources on things like making naloxone, the life-saving overdose reverse medication, accessible to all citizens, informing the public about our 24/7 helpline, building a referral tool for individuals struggling to navigate our system to obtain services, and expanding the treatment network within health systems and primary care doctor office settings. We will continue to support these efforts to improve access, but also shift some of our focus to improving the quality of services being provided. Providing quality services is crucial for helping individuals with substance use disorder achieve long-term recovery more quickly and effectively. The appropriate high-quality services delivered to these individuals will prevent them from cycling through the treatment system, thereby reducing their risk of overdose and ultimately death. The first step to ensuring individuals are receiving the treatment they desperately need and deserve was the department's implementation of the nationally recognized ASAM Criteria. This transition was and continues to be critical in addressing the need for individualized plans of care. Like any other disease, there is not a one-size-fits all treatment option for individuals battling substance use disorder. Now, we believe we have come to a crossroad where the department can focus on the quality of services an individual receives during their treatment.

Many of our efforts are made possible through federal grants secured from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to combat the opioid epidemic over the past two years. The first grant, the *State Targeted Response* grant, provided approximately \$26.5M in both FY2017-18 and FY2019-20 as part of the federal 21st Century Cures Act. A second grant, referred to as the *State Opioid Response* grant, was awarded in FY2018-19 and provided an additional \$55.9M to the commonwealth for initiatives focusing on prevention, treatment,

recovery, education, and training surrounding the opioid epidemic. In total, Pennsylvania has received nearly \$109 million from SAMHSA to address the opioid crisis.

I'd like to provide you with an update on some of our top priorities for the coming months and how these dollars are being utilized, but before doing so it's important to know that the spending of these dollars has been a truly collaborative effort across the health and human services agencies, as well with our public safety partners. Under the disaster declaration, the Wolf Administration has worked together to prioritize needs of the substance use disorder population across the spectrum and continues to meet regularly to refine those priorities and utilize the dollars coming to Pennsylvania in the most effective means. There is not a more collaborative effort across the commonwealth and the department takes great pride in that. Under Governor Wolf's leadership, the commonwealth is known nationally for the innovative ways we are combatting the opioid crisis and other states are turning to us to understand how they, too, can better spend federal funding to meet their goals. Our goals with these dollars have been and will continue to be:

Reducing Stigma

To reduce the human and economic impact of the disease of addiction, Pennsylvania must confront the devastating effects of stigma. We know that stigma creates barriers to treatment and opportunity. People with substance use disorders are less likely to be offered help and more likely to suffer discrimination from others, including medical professionals, employers, other individuals with substance use disorders, and even from themselves. Through education and advocacy, the department is committed to challenging those beliefs that hinder individuals from receiving needed treatment and support. An example of this is a collaboration between the department, Penn State University, and Independence Blue Cross Foundation, has launched a campaign Share Your Opioid Story. The website is a place where individuals can share their personal journey battling substance use disorder and provides an outlet for a population that is often voiceless. As part of the initiative, the department is hosting community conversations throughout the commonwealth bringing people together to dispel inaccuracies and empowering individuals to feel comfortable openly discussing substance use disorder and treatment options.

We are proud of the groundbreaking work being done to better communities throughout the commonwealth.

Intensify Prevention

The department has and continues to increase resources and technical assistance to Single County Authorities, local nonprofits, and community coalitions in support of local prevention programming. The aim of this programming is to positively influence the knowledge, skills, and behavior around the topic of addiction. The department has worked with sister agencies to educate prescribers on proper prescribing protocols for opioids and has implemented the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program in the commonwealth to ensure protocols are being followed. The department also believes that educating children at a young age is critical in preventing addiction. By integrating an evidence-based, data-driven approach to prevention in our schools and neighborhoods, our goal is to mitigate the future toll of this disease on Pennsylvania.

Strengthen Treatment Systems

Pennsylvania's substance use treatment system was ill-equipped to address the magnitude of the opioid epidemic. To prepare the commonwealth for the future, the department is committed to implementing strategies to build, sustain, and improve our treatment system. The changes will be targeted at promoting first-rate treatment, supporting providers, and integrating quality metrics into practice. The department is engaged in workforce development initiatives, targeting areas hardest hit by the opioid epidemic. We plan to utilize grant funding for various initiatives, including a loan repayment program for health care providers who are providing medical and behavioral health care and treatment for substance use disorder in areas where there is high opioid-use, where there are shortages of healthcare practitioners, or providers who serve a minimum of 30 percent low-income patients. The loan repayment is provided for approved practitioners in exchange for two years of service at a substance use disorder approved site.

Over the past year infrastructural changes to the system like the transition to the ASAM criteria and the implantation of the Web Infrastructure for Treatment Services (WITS) data system were two critical elements in strengthening Pennsylvania's treatment landscape. It is now time for the

department to capitalize on the recent system upgrades to improve our data collection methods and integrate quality measures into our treatment system.

Empower Sustained Recovery

Treatment works, and recovery is possible. Our ultimate vision is for all Pennsylvanians to live free, or in recovery, from addiction. While the overdose epidemic has unfortunately claimed the lives of thousands of Pennsylvanians, the department also recognizes the incredible potential for healthy, fulfilling, and sustained recovery for individuals on the other side of this disease. Our goal is to cultivate the support structure for individuals in recovery across the commonwealth to better prepare individuals for the transition out of treatment. To do so, examples of our goals include the establishment of sustainable funding and support for grassroots recovery organizations, collaboration with employers to strengthen a recovery-friendly business network, and aid in establishing additional recovery schools for youth.

Currently, the department, in collaboration with other state agencies, is utilizing funding to strengthen the recovery network by expanding services for specialty populations. For example, the administration understands that many individuals face barriers associated with social determinants of health that hinder their recovery, specifically stable housing. Using SOR funding, DDAP, in partnership with the Department of Human Services, the Pennsylvania Housing and Finance Agency and the Department of Community and Economic Development has launched a new program providing housing and supportive services to Pennsylvanians going through treatment for an opioid use disorder. The pilot program selected entities in 30 urban and rural counties throughout the commonwealth to assist individuals as they become and remain engaged in treatment programs while providing individuals supportive services to maintain stable housing.

Additionally, in the coming months, the department will publish for public comment the regulations for certification of drug and alcohol recovery houses that receive public funds or referrals, as required in Act 59 of 2017. Drug and alcohol recovery houses provide safe and supportive housing in a drug and alcohol-free environment. We plan to finalize these regulations by the end of the year.

On behalf of the department and the Administration, thank you for your continued focus and response to the public health crisis that we face with the opioid epidemic. As outlined above, the department's priorities are aimed at reducing stigma, intensifying prevention, strengthening treatment systems and empowering sustained recovery. I am committed to working with the General Assembly, my colleagues in the Wolf Administration, and our stakeholders to improve the treatment and recovery landscape across the commonwealth and look forward to working with you to make that a reality for those in need.