

Massachusetts Gov. Baker joins recovery community leaders to reflect on opioid epidemic progress

“Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito today joined Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, Attorney General Maura Healey, and leaders from the recovery community for a roundtable discussion on the Baker-Polito Administration’s collaborative progress in confronting the opioid epidemic over the past eight years.

The roundtable discussion was held at A New Way Peer Recovery Center in Quincy and included reflections from individuals and family members impacted by the opioid epidemic, as well as substance misuse providers and organizations. Roundtable participants included members of Governor Baker’s 2015 Opioid Working Group.

Watch the roundtable [here](#).

Since 2015, the Baker-Polito Administration has worked with the Legislature to support a fivefold increase in spending across the state budget to address substance misuse, with the Commonwealth investing nearly \$600 million in these initiatives in the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) budget signed by Governor Baker.

The Administration also worked with the Legislature to pass two landmark laws to address the opioid epidemic: The first law, passed in 2016, instituted a first-in-the-nation 7-day limit on first time opioid prescriptions and instituted new requirements around prescription monitoring and substance misuse screenings. The second law, passed in 2018, improved access to treatment from settings such as emergency

departments and the criminal justice system, and strengthened education and prevention efforts.

“The opioid epidemic has impacted thousands of families and communities across Massachusetts, and we have partnered with many organizations, leaders and families over the past eight years to make the Commonwealth a national leader in responding to this challenge,” said Governor Charlie Baker. “I am proud that our Administration and the Legislature have dramatically boosted funding that has increased access to treatment and recovery and enacted major laws that have become a model for other states and the nation. Most importantly, we have worked together to change the conversation and reduce stigma, which will help more people seek help and get the resources they need.”

“Our administration has made tackling the opioid epidemic a priority since day one, and we have been proud to work with so many partners to expand access to treatment and support recovery and prevention efforts,” said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito. “Over the past eight years, Massachusetts has led the way in expanding substance misuse initiatives and getting people access to the help that they need.”

The Baker-Polito Administration has worked with a wide range of partners including treatment and recovery providers, advocacy organizations, individuals, families, the courts, law enforcement, educational institutions and many others to confront the opioid epidemic. After peaking in 2016, opioid-related overdose deaths fell for the next several years, with the November 2019 report showing 99 fewer deaths than the same period from a year earlier. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a nationwide increase in overdose deaths, but Massachusetts’ numbers have continued to trend lower than nationwide figures, and the most recent report from the Department of Public Health (DPH) indicated that initial 2022 data showed overdose deaths decreasing again.

“Over the past eight years, we have made enormous strides in raising awareness and improving access to quality, equitable substance use disorder and behavioral health treatment across the Commonwealth,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders. “We have invested strategically in evidence-based resources and promising practices including peer recovery, clinical treatment, harm reduction, outreach programs and low-threshold housing, recognizing that every individual’s path to recovery is unique.”

“Combating the opioid crisis has been and will remain a top priority in Massachusetts,” said Attorney General Maura Healey. “Together, with the Baker-Polito Administration, we have made meaningful progress in the fight against this epidemic and will continue to work toward justice, accountability, and improved access to treatment and recovery for our communities.”

“A New Way Peer Recovery Support Center, hosted by Bay State Community Services, welcomes everyone impacted by substance use disorders,” said Daurice Cox, Executive Director, Bay State Community Services. “We are a safe place that offers all pathways for recovery. Our staff use their lived experience, as people in recovery or as an ally in recovery, to provide support, compassion, understanding, and connection.”

Baker-Polito Administration’s Collaborative Record to Confront the Opioid Epidemic:

5X Increase in Substance Misuse Funding: Since taking office in 2015, the Baker-Polito Administration has worked with the Legislature to support a fivefold increase to state spending to address substance misuse. The FY23 budget signed by Governor Baker invests \$597 million in funding for substance misuse prevention, treatment and recovery programs across multiple state agencies, compared to \$119 million in FY15.

2016 Opioid Law: Shortly after taking office, the

Administration worked with the Legislature to pass landmark legislation to tackle the opioid crisis. Key components include:

- A first-in-the-nation 7-day limit on first time adult opioid prescriptions and a 7-day limit on all opioid prescriptions for minors
- New requirements for clinicians to check the Prescription Monitoring Program database before prescribing
- New requirements for schools to conduct substance misuse screenings and strengthen addiction education

2018 Opioid Law: In 2018, the Administration worked with the Legislature to pass a second major law that strengthened the state's education and prevention efforts, expanded the role of recovery coaches, and improved access to treatment. Key components included:

- Additional requirements for prescribers around data reporting and the institution of a new, statewide standing order for naloxone from pharmacies
- Created additional pathways to treatment from the emergency department, including more timely SUD evaluations and requirements to admit patients more quickly to treatment services
- Expanded the use of medication-assisted treatment in emergency departments, section 35 inpatient facilities and correctional facilities

Medical Education: The Baker-Polito Administration partnered with the Commonwealth's medical, dental and social work schools to develop core competencies and require increased education on opioids for students.

Expanding Access to Life-Saving Naloxone: The Administration has expanded access to Naloxone including through a standing statewide order at pharmacies. The Commonwealth has distributed over 663,900 doses of naloxone and received over

34,800 reports of successful overdose reversals. In May 2022, the Administration launched a Community Naloxone Purchasing Program, which has already shipped 1,132 doses to community organizations.

Housing-Focused Harm Reduction: In the last two years, the Administration has provided \$22 million in funding to date for housing-focused harm reduction and recovery support initiatives. This includes initiatives designed to help people transition from street and shelter settings to housing opportunities that provide stability supports, helping individuals maintain their recovery and housing stability. The state maintains an open procurement to add additional low threshold housing capacity across the Commonwealth.” - Mass.gov.