



SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS POLICY COMMITTEE HEARING

EVALUATING AND IMPROVING DRUG TREATMENT CENTERS IN PENNSYLVANIA

DECEMBER 6, 2021

Testimony of
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Thank you, members of the Senate Democratic Caucus Policy Committee, for the opportunity to discuss this important topic with you today.

As you all know, the opioid and addiction crisis have had devastating impacts on individuals and families across Pennsylvania and our nation over the last several years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, under Governor Wolf's leadership, we made tremendous progress by lowering the overdose death rate 18% from the height of the opioid crisis in 2017.

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on individuals living with substance use disorder (SUD). Anxiety, uncertainty, financial instability, and other factors have led to an increase in substance use and recurrence of use for those in recovery. A few weeks ago, the CDC announced that drug overdose deaths in the U.S. have topped 100,000 for the first time. The rise in stimulant use, including cocaine and methamphetamine, as well as synthetic fentanyl and polysubstance use have also played a role in the increased number of overdose deaths across Pennsylvania.

As we continue to evaluate the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had and continues to have on the drug and alcohol field, my department, the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP), understands that there is a very short window to connect someone with treatment when they are ready to seek it. We also understand the need for resources to make treatment more accessible to Pennsylvanians including the use of telemedicine. Our Get Help Now hotline continues to be a valuable resource for individuals seeking treatment and since the launch of the hotline in November 2016, over 45,000 callers have received treatment and recovery resources, and nearly 38,000 warm-line connections to treatment have been made.

In addition to the hotline, we know that providing Pennsylvanians with detailed, publicly-available information regarding treatment providers will assist individuals and families with finding high-quality services, which in turn, set them up for success on their recovery journey. Fortunately, we have already started the process of implementing ATLAS, the Addiction Treatment Locator, Assessment, and Standards Platform, which does just that.

Addiction Treatment Locator, Assessment, and Standards Platform (ATLAS)

In June 2021, we announced a partnership with national non-profit, Shatterproof, to help Pennsylvanians find high-quality SUD treatment through ATLAS. ATLAS is a free, web-based platform which will serve as an additional tool in the toolbox for individuals and their families experiencing SUD.

The platform contains a 13-question assessment tool to determine the most appropriate level of care for the individual seeking help and then provides a list of facilities to meet those needs. The platform also provides information on facility accreditations, special groups served, payment options, and insurance accepted.

ATLAS will also assist state policymakers, providers, and insurance payers to drive improvements across the drug and alcohol treatment space, through increased accountability and transparency.

Licensed Treatment Provider Data Collection

Licensed treatment provider participation in ATLAS is not mandatory but highly encouraged. In order for a facility profile to be displayed on the ATLAS website, SUD treatment providers must complete the ATLAS Treatment Facility Survey. This survey is a data collection instrument that enables providers to report on the services, processes, and structures at their treatment facility or clinic.

Beginning in October 2021, 786 licensed SUD treatment providers were sent the Treatment Facility Survey. Both Shatterproof and DDAP continue to assist providers with completion of the survey, which is a critical milestone needed to achieve full launch of the ATLAS tool next spring. As of December 1, 2021, 62 licensed treatment providers have fully completed the survey process. Our agency continues to work closely with stakeholders to increase provider engagement in ATLAS and asks for members of the General Assembly to encourage participation from the providers in their districts.

Since Shatterproof publicly launched ATLAS in July 2020 for six states (DE, LA, MA, NY, NC, and WV), the site has seen over 5,300 unique visitors from Pennsylvania alone. As you can imagine, this number is very significant since Pennsylvania data is not yet in ATLAS.

Public Information

One of the most valuable aspects of ATLAS is its evaluation of SUD treatment providers' use of evidence-based best practices using Shatterproof's [National Principles of Care](#). These National Principles of Care are standards derived from the landmark 2016 Surgeon General's Report on Addiction, and robust data gathered through a combination of validated sources. The eight principles of care are:

1. Routine screenings in every medical setting;
2. Personalized evaluation and treatment plans;
3. Fast access to treatment;
4. Long-term disease management;
5. Coordinated care for every illness;
6. Behavioral health care from legitimate providers;
7. Medications for addiction treatment including medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder or alcohol use disorder; and
8. Support for recovery outside the doctor's office.

A substance use treatment providers' adherence to principles of care is then publicly displayed and users are able to compare facilities to find appropriate, quality services.

ATLAS also displays feedback collected from patients and family members of patients, allowing them the opportunity to give feedback on their experience, or a loved one's experience, while receiving care at a facility. This feedback is only displayed in ATLAS once 20 or more responses have been received in order to maintain client confidentiality.

Moving Forward

Information collected in ATLAS is consistent for all states participating in the platform. While the Pennsylvania data will be available in Spring 2022 and its focus is on substance use treatment providers, there has already been discussion about expanding the platform to Pennsylvania recovery houses. The PA ATLAS Advisory Council, which includes staff from Shatterproof, DDAP, Department of Human Services, Single County Authorities, licensed treatment providers, and a voice for parents, continues to meet regularly since July 2021 in order to appropriately capture the needs of our citizens. Additionally, staff from DDAP also participate in the multi-state check-in meetings.

Federal and State Progress Combatting the Disease of Addiction

Recent years have been marked by both progress and setbacks. While the setbacks can be difficult to digest, they have revealed new challenges and exposed how critical drug and alcohol prevention, treatment, and recovery programs are to the health and well-being of our fellow Pennsylvanians. Furthermore, I would be remiss if I did not mention the impacts of some initiatives and strategies that we have implored and have the chance to build upon, including:

1. *Increased access to naloxone and support for harm reduction:* Naloxone has been made available to first responders through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency since November 2017, with more than 114,069 kits made available and more than 19,138 overdose reversals reported through the program. Using DOH's Naloxone Standing Order, any individual is able, and encouraged, to obtain naloxone at their local pharmacy. Additionally, through a partnership with NEXT Distro, individuals across Pennsylvania can watch a training video and receive naloxone, by mail, to their home. All of this information can be found on DDAP's website at [Naloxone \(pa.gov\)](https://www.pacomm.com/naloxone). The Wolf Administration has also started a pilot program to provide co-pay assistance for Pennsylvanians obtaining naloxone, regardless of income level. Lastly, the administration has led the charge to increase support for decriminalizing life-saving harm reduction tactics such as syringe services programs and fentanyl test strips.
2. *Warm hand-off implementation.* Since January 2017, warm handoff programs have been implemented in 160 Pennsylvania hospitals, accounting for over 95 percent of the total hospitals in the commonwealth. Through these programs, more than 16,000 individuals have been directly referred to treatment. A total of 6,931 warm handoff encounters took place across these hospitals from January 2021 to April of 2021 alone.
3. *Reducing barriers to treatment.* Stigma associated with SUD remains to be a major barrier to an individual seeking treatment. In September 2020, Governor Wolf and DDAP

announced the launch of Life Unites Us, an anti-stigma campaign. It uses social media platforms to spread real-life stories of individuals and their family members battling SUD, live and recorded webinars detailing tools and information necessary to effectively reduce stigma to more than 350 community-based organizations focused on SUD prevention, treatment, and recovery, and a web-based interactive data dashboard detailing the progress of the campaign. During its first year, the campaign earned almost four million impressions on social media and more than half of those who viewed the campaign reported that they feel more prepared to talk with others about stigma against opioid use disorder.

4. *Workforce Education on SUD.* In May 2021, DDAP worked with the Pennsylvania Office of Administration to launch a [Just Five](#) website for commonwealth employees. Just Five is a website designed to educate individuals about SUD. Six short learning modules each take “just five” minutes to view. On October 6, 2021, DDAP and the Department of Labor and Industry [announced](#) another Just Five website geared toward the Pennsylvania workforce. Both websites contain unique resources, such as contact information for their Employee Assistance Programs. To date, a combined total of over 3,500 new users have visited these educational websites.
5. *Funding to SUD field.* In 2021 alone, DDAP provided more than \$2.9 million in federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grants to provide employment support services for individuals with SUD, almost \$2.8 million in SAMHSA grants for Recovery Community Organizations to expand or enhance recovery support services, and more than \$6.4 million in SAMHSA grants to provide support services to pregnant women and postpartum women in recovery from SUD. DDAP recently announced the availability of SUD treatment provider stabilization payments as well as a Grant Initiative Funding Announcement to expand drop-in center services for individuals with SUD. Visit our [Funding Announcements](#) page for more information on these funding opportunities.

On behalf of the Wolf Administration, thank you again for this opportunity. We are committed to continuing to work with you and all members of the General Assembly to address the ongoing addiction crisis, strengthen drug and alcohol treatment services and supports, and ensure that Pennsylvanians with SUD are receiving high-quality treatment from licensed providers across the commonwealth.