



Dear Colleague:

According to the Analysis of Overdose Deaths in Pennsylvania 2016 report prepared by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's Philadelphia Division and the University of Pittsburgh with data provided by the Pennsylvania State Coroners Association, more than 4,600 Pennsylvanians died from drug-related overdoses in 2016. This is a tragic 13 deaths per day, up from ten drug-related overdose deaths per day in 2015. In Pennsylvania, more than three times as many people died of drug-related overdoses in 2016 than motor vehicle accidents.

The prescription opioid and heroin crisis is the most significant public health crisis facing Pennsylvania. This crisis affects urban, suburban, and rural areas of our state. On January 10, 2018, Governor Tom Wolf signed a statewide disaster declaration to enhance state response, increase access to treatment, and save lives. Governor Wolf vowed to use "every tool at [his] disposal to get those suffering from substance use disorders into treatment, save more lives, and improve response coordination."

Emergency departments are critical partners in the commonwealth's response. Patients present in the emergency department for a range of reasons, including as a result of opioid overdose, voluntarily asking for substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, and, at times, because they are engaging in drug-seeking behavior. The enclosed Clinical Pathways tool is designed to help move these patients quickly through your emergency department and into SUD treatment. This tool was developed in partnership by the Pennsylvania Departments of Health and Drug and Alcohol Programs, as well as the Pennsylvania Chapter of the College of Emergency Physicians.

The tool provides a clinical pathway for an emergency department warm hand-off. A warm hand-off is an approach where a physical health provider facilitates the process for direct referral to SUD treatment. Similar to a heart attack patient who, once stable in the emergency department, would receive a facilitated referral to a cardiologist, opioid use disorder patients should receive facilitated referral to SUD treatment. The prescription opioid and heroin overdose crisis requires an all-hands-on-deck coordinated response. Thank you for your committed partnership and support in curbing this public health crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer S. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer S. Smith  
Acting Secretary  
Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel L. Levine, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel L. Levine, MD  
Physician General and Acting Secretary  
Department of Health