



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Two Harckham Bills Helping People with Substance Use Disorder Pass in Senate

PETE HARCKHAM June 4, 2021

| ISSUE: **SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER, BATTLING THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC, ADDICTION AND OVERDOSE PREVENTION**



*Albany, NY*— New York State Senator Pete Harckham and his Senate colleagues approved two important bills today that will benefit individuals coping with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and save lives across the state by authorizing equitable and timely access to certain medicines and treatment.

The bills, which Harckham introduced as chair of the Senate Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, are: S.649A, which will expand access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to help individuals overcome SUD; and S.2966A, which will require patients to be given a prescription for an opioid antagonist (to reverse the effects of a possible overdose) with their first opioid prescription.

“A major problem in the treatment of Substance Use Disorder is that systemic inequities in healthcare result in individuals with private, commercial insurance receiving a higher level of care and access to treatment and medicine than those with Medicaid,” said Harckham. “This legislation serves to create a level field for individuals with an immediate need for medication. These bills basically replace over-cautious regulations with common sense, and I thank my Senate colleagues for their support of these measures.”

Medication assisted treatment (MAT)—the gold standard in treatment for SUD—is an evidence-based method that uses Food and Drug Administration approved medications, such as methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone. These medicines have all been used successfully and more treatment providers are turning to this approach given its ability to reduce and block cravings, ease withdrawal symptoms and otherwise enable individuals to reach recovery more easily.

But medications used in MAT programs are not interchangeable and patients can respond differently to them, so the right choice should be left to patients and doctors. Under current law, individuals under Medicaid are not given the opportunity to access all forms of MAT and may be limited to one specific medicine. S.649A will allow individuals under Medicaid the ability to access whichever MAT medication is most beneficial to them—and without utilization control, mandated prior authorization or lifetime limits.

Currently, opioid antagonists such as naloxone need a stand-alone prescription. With drug-poisoning deaths involving prescription opioid analgesics, such as codeine and oxycodone, more than tripling nationally since 1999, it makes sense that patients have easier access to drugs that can reverse the effects of an overdose. S.2966A will include a prescription of an opioid antagonist with each patient's first opioid analgesic prescription in a given year.

It should be noted that opioid antagonists are non-habit forming and non-toxic. In 2018, the US Surgeon General urged all Americans to carry naloxone.

"As New York State continues to grapple with an alarming increase in overdose deaths and addiction, the NYS Senate today made two important steps to strengthen services for individuals seeking help for a substance use disorder," said John Coppola, executive director of the New York Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP).

"Providing people suffering with an addiction with access to all FDA-approved medications for SUD, with no prior approval or other barriers, puts patients and treatment professionals in the best position to assure that treatment is responsive to every individual's treatment needs. It also abolishes the unfair two-tier system where people on Medicaid do not have access to the same medications available to people with commercial insurance."

Coppola added, "The Senate also made the critical step toward providing an opioid antagonist to patients who receive a prescription for opioids, which will help to prevent accidental overdoses. We applaud Senator Harckham for his leadership and continued efforts to address overdose and addiction, and we urge the Governor to sign these bills into law."

Allegra Schorr, president of the Coalition of Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State (COMPA), thanked Harckham and the Senate for passing S.649A and said, "This bill removes prior authorization for medication-assisted

treatment by Medicaid-managed care companies and ensures that healthcare professionals are able to access FDA-approved medications used to save lives without the costly time-wasting activity of wrestling with insurance companies. We cannot delay in addressing the rapidly increasing opioid epidemic.”

Regarding Senate bill S.2966A, Schorr stated, “Access to naloxone is essential in stopping the surge in opioid overdoses. It’s a critical tool in an emergency. This bill guarantees that naloxone will be available for those at the highest risk of overdose.”

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### 2021-S2966A

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- Introduced
  - - In Committee Assembly
    - In Committee Senate
  - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
    - On Floor Calendar Senate
  - - Passed Assembly
    - Passed Senate
  - Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to prescribing an opioid antagonist with a patient's first opioid prescription each year

January 26, 2021

Senate Floor Calendar

Sponsored by **Pete Harckham**

Do you support this bill?