

**CHARLIE BAKER**  
GOVERNOR



**KARYN POLITO**  
LT. GOVERNOR

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**Governor Baker Announces Initial Steps To Combat Opioid Addiction  
Crisis**

*Releases County-Level Opioid Prescription Data For First Time*

**BOSTON** – Governor Charlie Baker today announced the first steps of his plan to attack the growing opioid addiction crisis in the Commonwealth, including the establishment of a 16 member Working Group and a call on insurers to more effectively manage opioid prescribing practices. Governor Baker made the announcement today at Hope House, a drug addiction treatment center in Boston after a brief tour of the facility and personal discussions with several clients in recovery.

“As we begin the process of addressing one of the Commonwealth’s most pressing public health emergencies, I am pleased to announce a 16 member Opioid Addiction Working Group which will be tasked with formulating a statewide strategy to combat addiction,” **said Governor Baker**. “We have brought together a group of individuals from many diverse backgrounds and experiences related to prevention, intervention, treatment, recovery support and law enforcement, who after holding a listening tour with stakeholders around the Commonwealth, will report back to the administration with specific, targeted and tangible recommendations to increase public awareness about these medications and reduce the rate of addiction.”

**The Working Group will:**

- Collaborate with experts and a broad range of interest groups to review resources and the manner in which they are utilized

- Preside over four public events, to be held in different regions of the state, to listen to communities and ignite conversation and ideas.
- Complete their work and submit a list of recommendations by May

In addition, the Governor is calling on insurers, both public and private, to develop their own set of best practices for opioid management. He pointed to Blue Cross Blue Shields' Prescription Pain Medication Safety Program, as a model. In the first two years of the program, claims for short-acting opioids such as Vicodin and Percocet, decreased by twenty-five percent.

"These medications can provide great relief for many patients, including those tormented by debilitating chronic pain or suffering in their last days of life," **said Governor Baker**. "But we need to make sure prescribing is appropriate. Insurers can play a big role, including establishing best practices and ensuring compliance."

The Governor also released today, for the first time, county-level data on the number of prescriptions written for opioids and the number of confirmed opioid-related overdose deaths. The prescription numbers are a result of the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP), which mandates all opioid prescribers enroll in the program. To date, 65% of MDs and DOs are currently enrolled, with the remainder expected to sign up by the fall of 2015.

"The best tool we have in this fight against opioid addiction is information," **said Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders**. "We can use this data to better inform how we distribute resources so we can help individuals and families that are at greatest risk get the help they need."

The PMP data highlights the number of individuals in a specific area who exhibit concerning behavior. Behavior is classified as "concerning" when an individual receives schedule II opioid prescriptions from different prescribers and then has those prescriptions dispensed at different pharmacies. In 2013, the data shows that in Plymouth County, for every 1000 individuals who receive one or more schedule II opioid prescriptions, close to 17 exhibit concerning behavior. In Bristol County, the number was slightly lower at 15.7, Barnstable County 15.5 and the lowest rate of concern was in Nantucket County where for every 1000 individuals who receive one or more schedule II opioid prescriptions only 1.4 exhibit concerning behavior.

Also released today, data from the Department of Public Health on unintentional overdose deaths in Massachusetts. The data shows that in 2013, there were 978 projected unintentional opioid overdose deaths representing a 46 percent increase

over 2012.

To help keep prescription drugs from being misused, the Governor is also urging citizens to go through their medicine cabinets and discard extra prescription pain medicine in secure drop boxes that are set up in many local police departments. A full list of drop box locations is available at [www.mass.gov/opioids](http://www.mass.gov/opioids).

Opioid addiction often begins when someone is prescribed a medication like Percocet or Vicodin after an injury or surgery. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately four out of five people who reported they began using heroin in the past 12 months had previously abused prescription pain medication.

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## **ADDRESSING OPIOID ADDICTION IN THE COMMONWEALTH**

### **WORKING GROUP**

**Marylou Sudders**, Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services

**Maura Healey**, Attorney General

**George Bell**, General Catalyst Partners

**Monica Bharel, MD, MPH**, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health

**Bill Carpenter**, Mayor of Brockton

**Colleen Labelle BSN, RN-BC, CARN**, Program Director of the State Technical Assistance Treatment Expansion Office Based Opioid Treatment with Buprenorphine (STATE OBOT B) program at Boston Medical Center; Executive Director of the Massachusetts chapter of the International Nurses Society on Addictions.

**Alan Ingram, Ed.D.**, Deputy Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**Judy Lawler**, Probation Officer, Chelsea District Drug Court

**Joseph D. McDonald**, Sheriff, Plymouth County

**John McGahan**, The Gavin Foundation

**Fred Newton**, President & CEO of Hope House, Inc.

**Robert Roose, MD, MPH**, Chief Medical Officer of Addiction Services at the Sisters  
of Providence Health System

**Cindy Steinberg**, National Director of Policy & Advocacy, U.S. Pain Foundation;  
Chair, Policy Council, Massachusetts Pain Initiative

**Ray Tamasi**, President and CEO of The Gosnold on Cape Cod

**Steve Tolman**, President, Massachusetts AFL-CIO

**Sarah Wakeman**, MD, Medical Director, Substance Use Disorders, Center for  
Community Health Improvement, Division of General Medicine, Department of  
Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital