



Dear Colleague,

The prescription opioid and heroin crisis is the most significant public health crisis facing Pennsylvania. According to the Pennsylvania Coroners Association report in 2015, over 3,500 Pennsylvanians died as a result of drug poisoning or overdose. This is an astonishing ten deaths per day. In Pennsylvania, more people die of drug overdose than car accidents. This crisis affects urban, suburban and rural areas of our state.

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 abuse 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 substance abuse 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 handoff." A warm hand off is an approach where a physical health provider does a face-to-face introduction to a substance abuse specialist and makes a direct referral into substance abuse 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 similar 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,

Handwritten signature of Jennifer Smith in cursive.

Jennifer Smith
Acting Secretary
Department of Drug
and Alcohol Programs

Handwritten signature of Rachel L. Levine, MD in cursive.

Rachel L. Levine, MD
Physician General
Department of Health

Handwritten signature of Karen M. Murphy, PhD, RN in cursive.

Karen Murphy, RN, Ph.D.
Secretary of Health
Department of Health