

Maryland Created Drug Treatment Plan for People Leaving Prison “ But Never Used It

Alex Hamilton March 14, 2019



Maryland Medical Cards for those leaving jail

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(Newswire.net -- March 14, 2019) -- As fatal drug overdoses were climbing in Maryland, state officials made the decision to target one of the most vulnerable groups of users: those leaving jail or prison.

Because these individuals have high rates of addiction and low rates of insurance, the state worked to [get federal permission](#) to issue temporary Medicaid cards to those leaving prison or jail.

Advocates of the initiative said it was a novel way to help prevent overdose deaths in those who are headed back to society. Inmates going back into their communities are at a high risk of using drugs again and overdosing, and many are unable to access help at [long-term drug rehab](#) facilities.

More than two years after gaining federal permission, the state has yet to use the authority.

In 2016, the state sought to sign up more individuals as they were released from prison or jail. Now, officials are saying that it's not necessary to enroll people because it's easy enough to sign them up for Medicaid if they can prove eligibility.

The state's persistent opioid epidemic serves as evidence that that efforts to expand treatment access is failing.

Maryland had 1,848 overdose deaths in the first nine months of 2018. That's four times the number of fatal overdoses during the same period in 2010. The majority of the fatalities are now linked to fentanyl, a powerful opioid, which is often mixed with heroin without the user's knowledge.

According to treatment providers, about two-thirds of people who are arrested have either a drug or alcohol problem. These individuals lose their tolerance while incarcerated, so they are at a much higher risk of overdose death when they are released. In fact, research from North Carolina found that heroin users were [74 times more likely](#) to overdose within two weeks of leaving prison.

Maryland's health officials say the initiative was only meant to serve as a backup. The backup, they say, has not been needed, as Medicaid applications can now be approved in as little as 24 hours. But approval can only go that quickly if the applicant has all of her his or her paperwork.

Advocates say the rate of enrollment among those just being released from prison and jail hasn't increased much. Many more people could be enrolled temporarily while they gather the documentation they need to qualify for Medicaid, such as proper identification and work histories.

More states are looking at ways to get former inmates into treatment.

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