

Senate Bill 641

Naloxone Distribution Expansion

Senator Richard D. Roth (D-Riverside)

SUMMARY

Senate Bill (SB) 641 will reduce California opioid overdose deaths by requiring the Naloxone Distribution Project (NDP) to provide all FDA-approved formulations and dosage strengths of naloxone to eligible NDP applicants.

BACKGROUND

A 2022 Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) study, “The Overdose Crisis in California: 2017-2021,” found an 800% increase in deaths caused by synthetic opioids—often fentanyl—between 2017 and the 12-month period ending in June 2021. The report found drug-related overdose is a top-ten cause of death in California, killing more people than influenza/pneumonia and over twice as many people as car accidents.¹

America's drug epidemic is the deadliest it has ever been, with more than 100,000 overdose deaths in the United States during the 12-month period ending April 2021. In California, overdose deaths rose by a staggering 47.8 percent over that same one-year period—the fifth largest increase in the nation.²

Naloxone is a scientifically proven medication that can reverse the effects of opioid overdose and save lives. The importance of naloxone in preventing overdose deaths cannot be overstated, particularly in light of the opioid epidemic. When administered in a timely manner, naloxone can rapidly restore breathing and prevent brain damage or death.

California's Naloxone Distribution Project, administered by DHCS, provides eligible applicants, including first responders, law

¹ <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/ccjbh/2022/01/31/policy-brief-the-overdose-crisis-in-california-2017-2021/>

² https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/202205.htm

enforcement, community organizations, schools, and local health agencies, free naloxone with the stated goal of combating overdose deaths across the state.

PROBLEM

While the Naloxone Distribution Project currently provides two-milligram (injectable) and four-milligram (nasal) doses of naloxone, there is increasing evidence that administration of a single four-milligram dose is insufficient to reverse an overdose due to the prevalence of fentanyl, which is up to 50 times more potent than heroin.

A peer-reviewed article published in the Harm Reduction Journal found that in 78% of overdose reversals, multiple doses of the four-milligram intranasal naloxone medication were required to reverse an overdose.³ This data, along with numerous other studies and reports, provides strong evidence for the need to have higher strength naloxone available in our communities.

In the face of an unprecedented overdose crisis, the NDP only provides two product options, instead of making all lifesaving overdose reversal tools available.

These current shortcomings threaten to reduce the efficacy of a program that is heavily relied upon by first responders, health care providers, and community organizations aiding Californians who overdose. Given the enormity and prevalence of the opioid epidemic, it is imperative that the state bolster the Naloxone Distribution Project to make as many tools as possible available to our impacted communities.

³ [Real-world study of multiple naloxone administration for opioid overdose reversal among bystanders \(biomedcentral.com\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8911111/)

SOLUTION

SB 641 would ensure that eligible applicants—those on the front lines of combatting overdose deaths—are equipped with the tools they need to save lives.

The availability of additional naloxone formulations and dosage strengths provided by SB 641 would ensure that NDP applicants have meaningful choice, while recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient for our diverse state.

Additionally, SB 641 will save scarce state resources. The most well-known naloxone product—Narcan—is a four-milligram intranasal formulation. Data shows that in the vast majority of overdoses, one dose is not sufficient. However, an eight-milligram intranasal formulation is also available at the same price, which would save the state money in cases where multiple doses are administered.

Opening up the NDP to additional products would save lives, save money, and ensure that Californians have access to the right overdose reversal product when they need it most.

STATUS

Introduced

SPONSOR

- CA Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives
- Riverside County Sheriffs

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