

DECLARATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

WHEREAS, on November 21, 2016, the State Health Commissioner declared that a public health emergency resulting from opioid addiction existed in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reports preliminary numbers indicating 2020 will be the worst year on record for fatal drug overdoses in Virginia evidenced by a 62.6% increase during the first two quarters of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the same period the year before; and

WHEREAS, the VDH Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reports that fatal drug overdose has been the number one method of unnatural death since 2013, that in 2019 fatal overdoses from all substances increased by 9.4% compared to 2018, and that the 1,626 fatal overdoses in 2019 was the largest annual total ever in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the VDH Office of Epidemiology reports that the number of emergency department visits for all drug overdoses increased 11% from the last quarter of 2019 to the first quarter of 2020; and

WHEREAS, fatal non-opioid illicit drug overdoses are on the rise with fatal cocaine overdoses increasing 9.4% and fatal methamphetamine overdoses increasing 55.9% from 2018 to 2019; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services reports a 62% increase in the number of Medicaid participants with a Substance Use Disorder diagnosis from 2018, and double the number from 2016; and

WHEREAS, Substance Use Disorder-related emergency department visits increased from 60.1 visits per 100 persons with Substance Use Disorder in 2018 to 73.5 visits in 2019, a 22% increase. Opioid Use Disorder-related visits increased from 25.9 visits per 100 persons with Opioid Use Disorder in 2018 to 33.3 visits in 2019, a 28.6% increase; and

WHEREAS, the VDH Office of Emergency Medical Services reports that from January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2020, 33,830 patients received naloxone administered by emergency medical services agencies in Virginia, of which at least 56% of the patients each year demonstrated improvement, suggesting that opioid effects were contributing to the condition of these patients; and

WHEREAS, the number of patients who received naloxone administered by emergency medical services agencies in Virginia increased from 7,909 in 2019 to 10,234 in 2020; and

WHEREAS, the increasing trend of drug addiction in Virginia is contributing to multiple adverse public health effects, including but not limited to increasing numbers of blood borne pathogen infections (e.g., hepatitis C and HIV), overdoses requiring emergency care, and deaths; and

WHEREAS, the continually increasing problem of injection drug use in Virginia is making communities vulnerable to outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as Hepatitis C and HIV, and is placing Virginians at risk for overdose and death related to drug use; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to § 32.1-13 of the Code of Virginia, the State Board of Health is authorized to make separate orders and regulations, not provided for by general regulations, for the purpose of suppressing nuisances dangerous to the public health and communicable, contagious, and infectious diseases and other dangers to public life and health; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to §32. 1-20 of the Code of Virginia, the State Health Commissioner is vested with all of the authority of the Board of Health when it is not in session;

NOW THEREFORE, the State Health Commissioner hereby amends the Declaration of Public Health Emergency issued on November 21, 2016, and declares that a public health emergency resulting from addiction continues to exist in the Commonwealth, affecting the health and safety of Virginians.

This Declaration shall be effective March 25, 2021, and shall remain in full force and effect until amended or rescinded.

Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Office of the State Health Commissioner of the Commonwealth of Virginia this March 25, 2021.



M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA
State Health Commissioner