



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Corrections Officials Announce Plans to Expand Medication-Assisted Treatment as Part of Stop Overdoses in Pa: Get Help Now Week

Somerset, PA – An opiate-specific therapeutic community at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Laurel Highlands served as a backdrop today as Department of Corrections (DOC) officials announced plans to expand its [Medication-Assisted Treatment \(MAT\) program](#). The announcement was part of Stop Overdoses in Pa.: Get Help Now Week.

The DOC is expanding MAT to include methadone and buprenorphine as standards of care where determined to be appropriate. The long-term goal is for the DOC to provide all FDA-approved medications to treat and manage addiction within its facilities.

Expansion of MAT includes:

- Medication-Assisted Opiate Detoxification: For new commitments, parole violators and diversion cases.
- Maintenance: For those individuals who are committed to the DOC and who are already receiving MAT.
- Initial Prescriptions: For those individuals who are committed to the DOC and who are not in need of detoxification, but who could benefit from MAT from the time of DOC commitment.

“We are treating substance use disorder as the chronic disease it is rather than as an acute illness,” said Steve Seitchik, DOC’s MAT program coordinator. “Research results suggest that long-term care strategies of medication management and continued monitoring produce lasting benefits. The use of MAT for those suffering from substance use disorder should be insured, treated and evaluated like other chronic illnesses.”

Since 2014, the DOC has worked to better equip individuals as they return to their communities after incarceration. The MAT program plays a huge role in their successes.

“If we can treat inmates with substance use disorder while incarcerated, we can help that person focus on reentry-specific challenges rather than having them fall back into a substance-use lifestyle,” Seitchik added.

Reports show that there are high rates of fatal overdose and non-fatal overdose among individuals leaving prison; that MAT is more effective than no MAT; and that MAT more than doubles the rates of opioid-abstinence outcomes in randomized, controlled trials comparing psychosocial treatment of opioid use disorder with medication versus no medication.

“We are on the right course for setting our reentrants on the path to a successful return home after incarceration,” Seitchik said. “Expanding our program will help individuals while they are in

prison, as they prepare and plan for their release, and upon release through a continuity of care.”

The continuity of care part of this initiative was an issue previously, because reentrants did not have their Medical Assistance (MA) benefits restored in time for their release. Now, through a cooperative effort with the PA Department of Human Services, benefits are in place at the date of an individual’s release from prison, ensuring the MAT continuity of care.

The DOC also received a \$3.2 million through the commonwealth’s most recent SAMHSA grant that will allow the agency to provide multiple Vivitrol injections prior to release from prison.

“That is expected to have a positive effect on retention in treatment upon release from prison and even better outcomes than we’ve seen so far,” said Tracy Smith, who serves as the DOC’s Director of Treatment Services.

Funds also will be used to pilot the use of Sublocade, which is injectable buprenorphine. According to Smith, “The DOC is partnering with other state agencies and community-based stakeholders to ensure effective and expedited continuity of care for individuals who receive Sublocade.”

Also at today’s event, officials provided access to specialty staff who administer the program and to inmates who participate by receiving medication.

More information is available on the [Pennsylvania Department of Corrections website](#).

Timeline of MAT Highlights:

2014 – the DOC began providing Vivitrol (Naltrexone for extended release injectable suspension) for female reentrants at SCI Muncy.

March 2016 – the DOC hired an MAT statewide coordinator responsible for providing training and technical assistance to site coordinators and serving as a liaison with DOC, Parole Board officials, single county authorities and community-based treatment providers.

2016 – a total of 78 injections were administered.

January 2017 – As guided by program evaluation results, DOC officials changed the general population Therapeutic Community Curriculum and the Co-Occurring Disorders Therapeutic Community Curriculum to continue providing the most effective, evidence-based treatment to the individuals who need it.

2017 – a total of 494 Vivitrol injections were administered.

March 2018 – the DOC converted six therapeutic communities (TCs) to Opiate Specific Therapeutic Communities at SCIs: Albion, Cambridge Springs, Camp Hill, Chester and Laurel Highlands and the Quehanna Boot Camp. Shortly thereafter, oral naltrexone maintenance was initiated at these facilities as an option for individuals who could benefit most by being maintained on this MAT for the duration of their incarceration. While these are the first institutions to implement this program, the goal will be to continue to expand the program based on successes and need.

April 2018 – the DOC expanded Vivitrol’s availability to all state prisons.

2018 (as of August 30) – 439 injections were administered.

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