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D.C. Update: NJ authorizes paramedics to administer buprenorphine at scene of overdose, new resource on non-stigmatizing language, and more



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## News from the States

### New Jersey authorizes buprenorphine induction at the scene of overdose

An [article](#) from Stat News announced New Jersey's decision to authorize paramedics to administer buprenorphine to patients immediately after an overdose. Paramedics in the State's 21 mobile intensive-care units will offer buprenorphine after using naloxone to revive the patient. The model attempts to address both the withdrawal symptoms that can occur from a naloxone revival and serve as a potential transition to long-term treatment. Due to federal regulations and waiver requirements, paramedics will need to contact the emergency physician overseeing their unit to obtain permission, and the supervising physician must be waived to prescribe buprenorphine. Dr. Shereef Elnahal, New Jersey's health commissioner, stated, "Buprenorphine is a critical medication that doesn't just bring folks into recovery – it can also dampen the devastating effects of opioid withdrawal. That's why equipping our EMS professionals with this drug is so important." The State alcohol and drug agency director for New Jersey is Valerie Mielke, Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) in the Department of Human Services. Assistant Commissioner Mielke serves on the NASADAD Board of Directors representing Region II.

### Ohio launches free online learning series focused on opioids

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), led by NASADAD member Lori Criss, recently announced the release of an Opioid Online Learning Series for healthcare professionals. According to the announcement, OhioMHAS used State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis (STR) grant funds to sponsor the development of the 23-part online curricula. Each module is approximately one hour long and can be completed as a standalone course or as part of the entire series, and all of the courses are free. The courses provide an overview of opioid use disorder and the use of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in specific medical settings, and highlight

evidence-based practices across the continuum of care. Additional details can be found [here](#), and courses can be directly accessed [here](#).

## In the News

### LAC releases report on Medicaid prior authorization for OUD medications

The Legal Action Center (LAC) recently released an [analysis](#) of gaps in Medicaid coverage and prior authorization requirements for opioid use disorder (OUD) medications. The report, "State Medicaid Programs Should Follow the 'Medicare Model': Remove Prior Authorization Requirements for Buprenorphine and Other Medications to Treat Opioid Use Disorders," found that 40 State programs still have prior authorization requirements on some or all buprenorphine-naloxone medications, and 35 have prior authorization requirements for buprenorphine. The report calls for CMS to issue guidance to State Medicaid Directors, "directing the removal of prior authorization requirements for buprenorphine medications and calling for expanded coverage of all FDA [Food and Drug Administration]-approved formulations for OUD treatment."

### New resource on non-stigmatizing language related to substance use

Journalist Maia Szalavitz, along with Northeastern University Associate Professor Leo Beletsky and journalism fellow Zachary Siegal, recently launched *Changing the Narrative*, a [website](#) to change the stigmatizing language sometimes used to describe individuals with substance use disorders. According to their website, *Changing the Narrative* is a network of reporters, researchers, academics, and advocates concerned about the way media represents drug use and addiction. As a guide for healthcare professionals, journalists, policymakers, and lawyers, the site offers expert sources and evidence-based information to shift the narrative away from stigmatizing language. Siegal notes that, "research shows that when someone is identified as a 'drug abuser' or an 'addict,' the perception is much more negative. People are more likely to think that an 'addict' deserves punishment." This perception may play a role in the incarceration of those with substance use disorders and biases from medical professionals. The creators of the website stress the importance of using person-first language and urge journalists to choose sources that have a scientific or medical background in addiction when writing about the topic.

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## Around the Agencies

### HHS e-learning program on cultural competency

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health (HHS OMH) is offering a new e-learning [program](#) called *Improving Cultural Competency for Behavioral Health Professionals*. The program is offered through HHS/OMH's "Think Cultural Health" website, which provides healthcare professionals with information, continuing education opportunities, and resources to learn about the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS). There are 4 courses included in the new cultural competency program: an introduction to cultural and linguistic competency; increasing self-awareness on personal cultural identity; increasing awareness of the client's cultural identity; and culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions and services. The program aims to help counselors, therapists, and medical providers in a number of ways, including by helping professionals better serve ethnic and racial

### CDC article on U.S. adults' attitudes toward lowering nicotine levels in cigarettes

Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Office on Smoking and Health (OSH) have published an article in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* titled "[U.S. Adults' Attitudes Toward Lowering Nicotine Levels in Cigarettes](#)."

minorities that have high rates of opioid misuse and low treatment rates.

### **SAMHSA and CMS release guidance on substance use and mental health services in school systems**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recently released a [joint informational bulletin](#), *Guidance to States and School Systems in Addressing Mental Health and Substance Use Issues in Schools*. As stated in the document, “this guidance includes examples of approaches for mental health and SUD [substance use disorder] related treatment services in schools and describes some of the Medicaid state plan benefits and other Medicaid authorities that states may use to cover mental health and SUD related treatment services.” Additionally, the guidance provides best practice models to encourage the implementation of evidence-based services.

The article found that the majority of adults in the United States are in favor of requiring cigarette manufacturers to lower nicotine levels in cigarettes so that they are less addictive. This includes American adults across all demographic categories—and even eighty percent of current cigarette smokers—who support lowering nicotine levels in cigarettes.