Overdose Prevention Campaign

Naloxone: Expanded Pharmacy Access

Drug Overdose is a Major Public Health Problem
Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death nationally and in New Jersey. Most of these fatalities involve opioids such as prescription painkillers or heroin.

Drug Overdose Deaths are Preventable
The majority of overdose victims do not actually die until one to three hours after taking a drug, and most of these deaths occur in the presence of others. This creates a significant opportunity for witnesses to intervene and provide help. In addition to calling 911, overdose witnesses can administer the opioid overdose antidote, naloxone (also known by the trade name Narcan). Naloxone is a life-saving prescription medication that counteracts respiratory depression associated with opioid overdose. Restoring the victim’s breathing as quickly as possible is the best way to prevent brain damage and death in an overdose emergency. Naloxone has no abuse potential, few side effects and is simple to administer, making it safe and easy for laypeople to use.

States Have Responded by Expanding Access to Naloxone—But More Must Be Done
Forty-one states, including New Jersey, and the District of Columbia have already enacted laws expanding access to naloxone by allowing laypeople and first responders to administer this life-saving drug. While thousands of lives have been saved because of New Jersey’s expanded access to naloxone, more must be done. Far too many people are still unable to access naloxone because of the limited capacity of community programs and the barrier of scheduling doctors’ visits. Although some pharmacies in New Jersey are currently able to offer naloxone to individuals without a prescription, this is not a statewide policy.

Some states, including New Mexico, Vermont, California, Washington and Rhode Island, are taking the next step to expand naloxone access by allowing licensed pharmacists to dispense it without a prescription. New Jersey must take similar steps by allowing pharmacists throughout the state to dispense this life-saving medication to individuals without a prescription. This can easily be done through legislation directing the New Jersey State Board of Pharmacy to adopt standardized protocols for licensed pharmacists to dispense naloxone.

Conclusion
Allowing licensed pharmacists to dispense naloxone without a prescription will save lives by ensuring that more people are prepared to help in overdose emergencies. New Jersey law already allows licensed pharmacists to administer various medications and vaccines without a prescription including chickenpox, hepatitis A and B, and influenza. Assembly Bill 2334/Senate Bill 295 would authorize the New Jersey Board of Pharmacy to develop protocols for direct dispensing of naloxone without a prescription. This legislation will enable individuals at risk for overdose, their families, friends and peers to conveniently obtain naloxone at a pharmacy, better ensuring that naloxone is in the hands of those who are in the best position to help in overdose emergencies.