Virginia Legislators Pass Five New Bills to Combat the State's Opioid Crisis

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Virginia Governor Terry McAulliffe signed five new bills last week to help arm the state's fight against its ongoing opioid and overdose epidemics, Inside Nova reports.

The bills aim to address the heroin and prescription painkiller crisis in various ways. For instance, SB 848, sponsored by Sen. Jennifer Wexton (D–Loudon), and HB 1453, sponsored by Del. David LaRock (R–Loudon), passed at Virginia's recent 2017 legislative session, will allow community organizers across the state to dispense and train individuals to use naloxone, a drug that can help reverse opioid overdoses on the spot.

HB2165, sponsored by Del. Todd Pillion (R–Washington), mandates that all opioid prescriptions be transmitted to pharmacies electronically by 2020. The new law was designed to help combat prescription fraud, drug diversion and abuse across the state.

HB2317, by Del. John O'Bannon (R–Henrico), will allow local health departments to administer harm reduction programs and syringe exchange initiatives in areas of the state with high rates of HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV). The law also amps up testing programs for both viruses and will help connect people to addiction treatment.

Finally, HB1786 by Del. Chris Stolle (R–Virginia Beach) mandates a family assessment and plan of care from local social service organizations if a child is found to have been exposed to opioids in utero. The law will help connect the mother to treatment if necessary and provides services to help ensure the safety of both mother and child.

In 2016, the Virginia Department of Health estimates that more than 1,000 people died in Virginia from an opioid overdose—a 33 percent increase from the previous year. In November 2016, Governor McAuliffe joined Virginia State Health Commissioner Marisa Levine in declaring a public health emergency around the crisis across the state. These bills appear to be solid moves toward addressing the crisis.

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