



December 2, 2019

## **Let's Increase Access to Naloxone to Prevent Fatal Heroin Overdoses**

We need to increase our efforts to combat the current epidemic of deaths due to heroin/opioid overdoses by promoting access to the overdose reversal medication naloxone, also known as Narcan.

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Naloxone and Opioid Overdose was released April 5, 2018, in response to the alarming escalation of opioid overdose deaths across the country. Despite evidence of the effectiveness of naloxone in reducing opioid overdose deaths, awareness of the drug's benefits and its possession and use among patients, prescribers, community bystanders, and even first responders in some areas remains limited. The Advisory promotes increased access and use of naloxone to save lives.

As the 2016 Co-founder and current Chair of the West Side Heroin/Opioid Task Force, I recently secured a \$350,000 grant to increase access to naloxone and treatment of heroin/opioid addiction. The grant is administered by Prevention Partnership, Inc., working with many community organizations, including the Chicago Recovering Communities Coalition. I have also introduced House Bill 3879 which extends Good Samaritan protections when naloxone is given, by providing that a person who, in good faith, seeks or obtains emergency medical assistance for someone experiencing an overdose shall not be deemed to violate his or her conditions of aftercare release (for a juvenile) or conditions of parole or mandatory supervised release.

Our main goal is to save lives. No family should ever have to go through the pain of losing a loved one because of overdose. We want to bring together community-based organizations, government agencies, people with lived experience of addiction and overdoses, and their families and loved ones. Training and increasing the availability of naloxone nasal spray is crucial, targeting the areas hardest hit on the West Side. Naloxone distribution must be coupled with information and referral to Medication Assisted Treatment for opioid use disorder, using buprenorphine [Suboxone], methadone, or other medications, along with counseling.

According to the Chicago Department of Public Health, deaths from heroin/opioid overdoses disproportionately affect the West Side of Chicago, where the heroin overdose death rate in some communities like North Lawndale are 7 times higher than Illinois' rate and 3 times higher than Chicago's rate.

More people need to take advantage of the Illinois Department of Public Health's Standing Order to obtain their personal dose of naloxone from a pharmacy - no prescription is needed - just go to the pharmacy and ask for naloxone using your insurance card, and they will give it to you.

Most Medicaid Managed Care organizations like CountyCare or BlueCross/BlueShield or others will cover the copay for naloxone. All Medicaid clients should go to a pharmacy to get their free naloxone (Narcan) kit. Our goal is to have every home have Narcan like every home has smoke detectors.

However, when I went to get naloxone with my private health insurance, a \$125 copay was required; and someone with Medicare told me the same story – it was not affordable. I call on pharmaceutical and insurance companies to reduce costs and co-pays for naloxone, to increase access to this life-saving intervention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'La Shawn K. Ford', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District