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## Senate Committee Hears About NJ's Opioid Abuse Epidemic





2-4-16

Senate Committee Hears About NJ's Opioid Abuse Epidemic



**By Michael Hill**  
*Correspondent*

“We still have several treatment centers with waiting lists that are weeks long at this point. The fact of the matter is people die while they’re waiting,” said Star-Ledger reporter Stephen Stirling.

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A reporter invited to give this state Senate Health Committee an update on the opioid and heroin abuse epidemic in New Jersey. Stirling reported The Star-Ledger's "Welcome to Herointown" and wrote the state has 128,000 heroin addicts — enough to make it the state's fourth largest city.



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"The scope of this is so much larger than that," Stirling said.

The committee called the report eye-opening but Sen. Ron Rice of Newark said for urban New Jerseyans, "For the record I want to be very clear that this is not new to me."

Ken Corson of [Inspira Health Network](#) said the battle calls for new approaches.

"Anyone that's admitted to one of three hospitals will be screened for substance abuse. If they trigger positive we have drug and alcohol coaches who are experts in addiction that will meet with that patient and help them treatment," he said.

One doctor offered a blunt assessment. He says doctors themselves, prescribers, are a big part of the problem.

"Essentially, the medications that I had been prescribing, and others, were providing a deceptively easy path into addiction to the opioid pills and to heroin. There's been over a 600 percent increase in opioid pain medications since 1997," said Dr. Daren Anderson, director of the [Weitzman Institute](#).

The [Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey](#) says it holds meetings for doctors called Do No Harm.

"What's amazing is 90 percent of the physicians who attended these symposiums — doctors and dentists — 90 percent of them said they plan to change their prescribing habits," said Executive Director Angelo Valente.

Two senators suggested legislating the number of pills doctors can offer per prescription. Another asked if genetic tests could have a role.

“Are there those folks who we can tell, boy, we’d better not do it because they’re just going to go over the edge really fast,” said Sen. Diane Allen.

“Although you might not be able to identify through genetics who is at risk, there are screening tools,” said Anderson.

[Barnabas Health](#) just started a state-funded program that has recovery specialists within an hour go to the hospital bedsides of those who overdosed but were rescued by Narcan.

“Engaging with this population is extremely difficult. So our peer specialist, we’ve launched for one week, they’ve gotten 70 percent of their interventions into treatment,” said Connie Greene, vice president of Barnabas Health Institute for Prevention.

Greene and other advocates say while the effort clearly needs more money it could go along with education and prevention.

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<b>MRK</b>	<b>48.86</b>	<b>+0.27</b>	4964596
<b>HON</b>	<b>101.41</b>	<b>-1.14</b>	988558
<b>PBF</b>	<b>30.45</b>	<b>-0.63</b>	562160
<b>CB</b>	<b>112.64</b>	<b>-0.58</b>	539566
<b>ADP</b>	<b>81.65</b>	<b>-1.15</b>	489303
<b>PEG</b>	<b>42.435</b>	<b>+0.015</b>	841065
<b>BBBY</b>	<b>42.72</b>	<b>-0.53</b>	847053
<b>HTZ</b>	<b>8.32</b>	<b>-0.31</b>	3101724
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Last Updated: 2/5/2016 @ 11:18am

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Major funding for NJTV News provided by Barnabas Health, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, LiveU, PSE&G, New Jersey Education Association, and New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Group.

Additional support for NJTV News is made possible by The Hyde and Watson Foundation, The Rita Allen Foundation, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, The E.J. Grassmann Trust, The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The F.M. Kirby Foundation, and The Union Foundation.

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