

Karen's Corner



The regular session of the 82nd Legislature ended on March 14, 2015, and several important healthcare-related bills passed. Some of those bills relate to our bureaus, and in this column below, I will share a few of those important to DHHR in its mission to serve West Virginians.

Under Senate Bill 262, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the Children's Health Insurance Agency will be transferred from the Department of Administration to DHHR on May 19. We're glad to welcome the agency and look forward to working collaboratively to address child healthcare issues.

Senate Bill 88 requires state and federal criminal background checks for providers in DHHR's WVCARES program. By implementing this requirement, West Virginia is taking a decisive step to participate in the National Background Check Program. This bill will allow us to stop those who might abuse, neglect, or financially exploit our most vulnerable citizens through comprehensive background checks.

DHHR is excited about Senate Bill 559, Child/Adult Protective Services and Social Services, which will expand the degree programs acceptable to be eligible for jobs in adult/child protective services and other social services. This will provide a reasonable mechanism for the Department to address its workforce shortage without compromising the quality of its social service delivery. This bill represents a significant change from the current restrictions in social work licensure requirements and is therefore an improvement in the process. Implementation of the new requirements is in progress and appropriate DHHR staff will be notified as necessary.

In 2013, America's Health Ranking ranked West Virginia as #1 in the nation for its low incidence of infectious diseases. Strong immunization policies and early interventions have proven effective in keeping these infectious disease rates at a minimum in our state. Immunization protects not only the child but their family, neighbors and the entire community from diseases which are easily and safely preventable. One very important bill that was signed into law was Senate Bill 286, which helps us maintain our current ranking and streamline the medical exemption process to be more effective and efficient for our children and families.

Another bill that will help promote the health and well-being of our citizens is Senate Bill 335 – the Opioid Antagonist Act. This bill, effective May 27, allows emergency responders, medical personnel, family and friends to possess and administer a drug that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. I am confident that this will enable us to strengthen our fight against substance abuse and will result in the recovery of many struggling individuals.

I'd like to thank each member of the West Virginia Legislature for their hard work during the session. Many lawmakers took the time to meet with me to address concerns and questions, and I am thankful for their unwavering dedication to the people of West Virginia. I also appreciate the extra time and effort put forth by DHHR leadership and employees during the session. Together, we **are** making a difference.

Secretary Bowling Encourages West Virginians to "Step" into a Healthy Lifestyle

On April 1, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources partnered with the American Heart Association and Thomas Health System to help kick off National Walking Day with a call-to-action event at St. Francis Hospital in Charleston.

DHHR Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling joined Steve Dexter, CEO of Thomas Health System, and other health leaders to encourage West Virginians to initiate a walking routine in order to reduce the risk of serious diseases, like heart disease, stroke, diabetes and more.

"Sometimes it can be hard to find time to walk during the day with our busy schedules, but there are several ways to make walking a priority," said Secretary Bowling.



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Secretary Bowling walks alongside Steve Dexter, CEO of Thomas Health System, on National Walking Day.

SECRETARY BOWLING ENCOURAGES, *continued*

“Little things like taking the stairs instead of the elevator and walking during your lunch break can be the key to a healthy lifestyle. I made a pledge today to keep my sneakers in my office so I can walk in between meetings. The recommended thirty minutes of exercise can be easily obtained by breaking it up into 10 minute increments throughout the day.”

West Virginia ranks poorly in America’s health rankings and is ranked number one for cardiovascular disease prevalence.

“It’s time for us, as members of the DHHR team, to take steps to change these statistics and encourage our fellow co-workers, family and friends to do the same,” said Secretary Bowling. “Together, we can create a healthier West Virginia.”

Life-changing law to help struggling opioid addicts



Mr. Hughes at the signing of the Opioid Antagonist Act.

On March 9, 2015, Governor Tomblin signed into law Senate Bill 335, the Opioid Antagonist Act. This bill, effective May 27, allows emergency responders, medical personnel, family and friends to possess and administer a drug called Naloxone, which reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.

“I am confident that this will enable us to strengthen our fight against substance abuse and will result in the recovery of many struggling individuals,” said DHHR Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling.

Sean Hughes, a Wheeling resident who credits Naloxone with his own recovery, said, “This law will undoubtedly save thousands of lives. People will be given a chance at life again and have the potential to be a beacon of hope

for others in active addiction.”

Sean’s addiction started in his teenage years when he returned to school after being bed-ridden as a result of severe migraines and morphine treatments. Eager to reunite with his friends, he joined them in their use of designer drugs until he could no longer afford them. He was then introduced to heroin, averaging 10 bags a day.

Despite several rehabs and relapses, Sean said he did not realize the negative impact substance abuse was making in his life until he nearly died from an overdose and was “saved by Naloxone.”

It all started when he ran out of heroin and took 16 Dilaudid (hydromorphone) opioid pills, from his parents’ medicine cabinet. He was found incapacitated by a friend and was taken to the emergency room.

“The doctors gave me a shot of Naloxone, which I remember very vividly because it hit me like lightning, waking me up from my overdose,” said Sean.

“I truly believe that receiving Naloxone saved my life for something greater,” said Sean. Soon after the incident, Sean spent six months in rehab and then entered a recovery home, Oxford House, which helped him overcome his addiction. He now helps make recovery possible for others by opening houses in Wheeling and other parts of West Virginia as the state coordinator for Oxford House.

“Parents in West Virginia will get their children back and children will get their parents back. There is hope of recovering from this disease and I am so happy that the state of West Virginia worked so hard to get this bill passed. They have shown everyone that they care about people suffering from addiction and that they are working hard to save their lives and bring them back to society. Speaking for myself and those that are still in the grips of addiction, I would like to express my gratitude to Gov. Tomblin for signing this bill,” Sean said.

Sean advises anyone who needs help to go to Narcotics Anonymous, check into rehab or contact him at 724-734-6902.

Through the Governor's Advisory Council on Substance Abuse, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources and the West Virginia Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety have established a number of critical initiatives to support ongoing efforts in local communities and provide those struggling with addiction with access to the help they need.

DHHR’s Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities’ Division on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse also works to reduce the likelihood of substance abuse through prevention, control, treatment, rehabilitation, educational research and planning for substance abuse related services. Learn more at <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/bhhf/sections/programs/ProgramsPartnerships/AlcoholismandDrugAbuse/Pages/default.aspx>.

