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CONTACT: Rick Osborn (503) 986-1074
Rick.osborn@state.or.us

Senate passes bill to help battle prescription painkiller abuse epidemic

HB 4124 allows prescription of overdose prevention medication

SALEM – The Oregon Senate voted on Monday to advance a measure that will help address Oregon’s epidemic of prescription opioid and heroin abuse.

House Bill 4124 – which passed the Senate on a unanimous 28-0 vote – streamlines practitioner access to Oregon’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), by allowing for integration into existing health information technology systems — an improvement that will assist health care providers in identifying possible warning signs of opioid addiction. The bill also expands prescribing and dispensing of Naloxone, a life-saving prescription medication that reverses heroin and prescription opioid overdoses.

“With the high opioid addiction rates throughout the state, this bill gives health care providers a tool that helps them prevent patients from acquiring prescription drugs to feed addictions,” said Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Beaverton), who works as a family physician and carried the bill. “This bill also expands access to life-saving medication in emergency situations when someone is overdosing on heroin or opioids.”

Oregon’s rate of non-medical use of prescription pain medications ranks second highest in the nation, with almost one in four Oregonians having received a prescription for opioid medications in 2013. According to the Oregon Public Health Division, there were 154 opioid overdose deaths in 2014. Oregon’s PDMP was created by the Legislature in 2009 and was expanded in 2013 to aid health care providers and pharmacists in better managing patients’ prescriptions, supporting the appropriate use of prescription drugs and reducing the number of

prescription drug overdoses. Currently front-line emergency room physicians and primary care providers are providing safe and effective pain treatment, but giving prescribers the ability to efficiently check the PDMP is a vital and valuable tool for assisting patients in managing their prescriptions, reducing abuse and preventing possible overdose.

Under HB 4124, authorized PDMP users will have more effective, timely access to prescription information in the PDMP system through integration with existing health information technology platforms that practitioners already use, such as the Emergency Department Information Exchange. The bill will improve ease of access for current PDMP users, but does not expand on the number or type of individuals who can see information stored in the PDMP. Stringent privacy and security standards will continue to be maintained.

HB 4124 also expands access to Naloxone (Narcan), a prescription medication that reverses heroin and prescription opioid overdoses. In 2013, the Oregon Legislature expanded access to the drug to ensure that a patient's family or other trained individuals could get and administer Naloxone in the event of an emergency. HB 4124 ensures direct access to Naloxone through a pharmacist and permits certain social service agencies to obtain and use Naloxone.

Together, the provisions of HB 4124 reflect the commitment of Oregon's physicians, prescribers, social service providers and legislative leaders to reducing opioid misuse, abuse and unintentional overdose.

HB 4124 now goes to Gov. Kate Brown for signature.

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