NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

States Scramble to Respond to Heroin Epidemic

Tuesday, 17 June 2014 17:19

State governors, legislatures and law enforcement across the country are scrambling to respond to the resurgence of heroin, *USA Toda*y reports.

"It's really on the top of everyone's radar from a public health perspective," said Thomas MacLellan, Director of Homeland Security and Public Safety for the National Governors Association.

New heroin bills were introduced in at least 18 state legislatures, the article notes.

The measures range from leniency for low-level heroin offenders, to permitting easier access to the opioid overdose antidote naloxone. Some states are considering tougher sentences for drug trafficking involving heroin.

Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts declared a public health emergency earlier this year, after deaths from heroin and opioid drugs rose more than 90 percent since 2002. The state will spend $10 million to create a court diversion system to provide treatment for non-violent drug offenders. Massachusetts will also devote an additional $20 million to the state's drug treatment system.

Governor John Kasich of Ohio agreed to enroll his state in a Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act in response to the heroin crisis, according to the newspaper. Kasich, a Republican, decided to accept federal assistance despite the political consequences, because of the drug's toll on state residents.

In January, Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin said his state is suffering from a "full-blown heroin crisis." In his State of the State Message, Governor Shumlin said he wants officials to respond to addiction as a chronic disease. He focused his entire speech on drug addiction and its consequences.

Advocates in a number of states are pushing for changes to laws to allow families to petition courts

to intervene and order addiction and rehab treatment for loved ones addicted to heroin, even if they have no criminal record.