



# HENRY MCMASTER

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### **Gov. Henry McMaster Declares Public Health Emergency for Opioid Epidemic**

*Governor Issues Executive Orders Creating "Opioid Emergency Response Team" & Five-Day Limit on Initial Opioid Prescriptions for Acute and Post Surgical Usage*

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** – Governor Henry McMaster was joined today by members of the General Assembly, cabinet agency officials, and members of the state's law enforcement community to declare a statewide public health emergency for the opioid epidemic and to announce a comprehensive, statewide response to the ongoing crisis. The governor's emergency declaration allows state officials, private partners, and law enforcement to utilize the emergency management infrastructure to combat the growing epidemic of opioid deaths, addiction, and abuse.

"The opioid crisis is one that has invaded so many aspects of the lives of South Carolinians and of families across the country," said Gov. Henry McMaster. "We are confident that if there is a group capable of combating this problem, providing treatment for those affected, and bringing about tangible results that will change lives, it's this group of dedicated, talented individuals that we have been able to put together."

The governor issued two executive orders, [the first of which establishes the "Opioid Emergency Response Team,"](#) led by State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) Chief Mark Keel, and Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) Interim Director Sara Goldsby and officially declares the public health emergency. South Carolina Adjutant General Robert Livingston and SCEMD will play a critical role in the Response Team's efforts, allowing for the use of the emergency management infrastructure most commonly utilized during natural disasters.

The Response Team consists of representatives from state and federal law enforcement agencies, state health and regulatory agencies, health care treatment providers, and other stakeholders.

"Unfortunately, we know that we have not yet reached the peak of the opioid crisis," said Sara Goldsby, Interim Director of DAODAS. "While our work in South Carolina is urgent and ongoing, cross-sector coordination is key to comprehensively addressing this public health crisis and its related consequences. The Opioid Emergency Response Team that the governor is establishing can strategically optimize information, data, and partnerships. The attention and response at this level will also help reduce the stigma of addiction that in part fuels the problem."

"I strongly believe in the power of partnerships and what can be done by working together," said SLED Chief Mark Keel. "To reach the goals we want for our state, we must come together with the expertise each of these respective agencies and organizations possess to bring about the changes needed to eliminate this threat to our society."

"One piece of the puzzle I hope to bring to the table is us not losing the humanitarian aspect of what we're here to talk about today," said Representative Eric Bedingfield, Chairman of the S.C. House Opioid Abuse Prevention Study Committee. "My family is just one of the more than 600 in South Carolina who have lost loved ones as a result of this epidemic. These people who find themselves addicted are not morally corrupt individuals. These are people who have a disease and who need help."

[Governor McMaster also issued an executive order directing the state Department of Health and Human Services to limit initial opioid prescriptions for acute and post-operative pain to a maximum of five days for state Medicaid recipients.](#) At the governor's request, the state Public Employee Benefit Authority (PEBA) has agreed to enact similar limits for participants in the State Health Plan, and the governor today requested that the General Assembly pass legislation making the five-day limitation state law for all initial opioid prescriptions.

The Response Team will hold monthly meetings for the first six months of its existence to assess outcomes, evaluate new information, and develop further strategic plans. The first meeting will be held tomorrow, Tuesday, December 19 at 2:30 PM.

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