

House Bill 317 - Overdose Awareness Day

SUPPORT

House Health & Government Operations Committee

March 15, 2023

The Maryland-DC chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (MDDCSAM), whose members are physicians and other health providers who treat people with substance use disorders, supports House Bill 317.

International Overdose Awareness Day was started in 2001 by Sally J. Finn of The Salvation Army in Melbourne, Australia. August 31st is now recognized as Overdose Awareness Day around the world. Events are held that day in cities and towns all over the world in remembrance of those lost to overdoses. Awareness days are opportunities for community groups, employers, schools, and local officials to conduct educational and advocacy events to promote prevention and policies that create greater access to treatment, harm reduction services, and recovery supports.

These events are also intended to reduce the stigma associated with the disease. The impact of reducing stigma is often not realized. It influences everyday attitudes, policy-making, financing care, distribution of access to care, and the delivery of care. Overdoses largely occur with the use of opioids and stigma against the use of medication in the treatment of opioid use disorders results in lack of access to opioid agonist therapy, a reduced willingness to receive treatment, and is a significant barrier to recovery.

Overdose Awareness Day sheds light on not only the devastating impacts of substance use disorders to individuals, but also to the burden on society. Paul Earley, former President of the American Society of Addiction Medicine wrote, "We will continue to advocate for policies that shatter the stigma and discrimination surrounding addiction, expand access to evidence-based care for individuals who are incarcerated or otherwise marginalized, and remove the structural barriers that prevent many Americans from accessing quality addiction treatment."

Awareness is the first step in this process. We respectfully request an favorable report on House Bill 317.