



STATE OF MARYLAND

# DHMH News Release

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

*Larry Hogan, Governor - Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor - Van T. Mitchell, Secretary*

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*Office of Communications  
Christopher Garrett  
410-767-6490*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

### **Maryland Health applauds FDA approval of opioids “black box” warning** *Insurer donates \$750,000 to boost State’s prescription monitoring program*

**Baltimore, MD** (March 22, 2016) – The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is applauding the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s approval of a warning label for opioids whose abuse could lead to addiction or overdose.

“Maryland’s health department strongly supports the federal government’s approval of the ‘black box’ warning for prescription opioids,” said Health and Mental Hygiene Secretary Van T. Mitchell. “The slide from prescription opioid use and abuse to heroin and fentanyl addiction has been well-documented. The importance of providers helping their patients to manage chronic pain in ways that preclude that abuse and addiction informs the State’s response to this epidemic, including the prescriber-training seminar we co-sponsored last October.”

“Prescribers’ best practices are a critical element to responding to this epidemic,” said Health and Mental Hygiene Deputy Secretary of Public Health Howard Haft. “For that reason, we also signed on to a recent multistate petition of the government to approve warning labels tied to the use of opioids with benzodiazepines.”

Maryland’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program also is another tool the department has been using in the fight against opioid abuse and addiction. Health and Mental Hygiene has been pressing for broad adoption by health care providers as a way for them to monitor the patterns of prescription access by their patients. On Monday, Chesapeake Employers’ Insurance Company announced a gift of \$750,000 to Health and Mental Hygiene to use over the span of three years to strengthen that monitoring program.

“This donation to the State is representative of a cross-sector partnership geared toward strengthening the response to the heroin-opioid epidemic, which is affecting every segment of Maryland,” said Secretary Mitchell.

“Chesapeake Employers wishes to support DHMH in its opioid abuse prevention efforts by providing a monetary gift to the department for its use in bolstering the state’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program and other efforts designed to stop the opioid epidemic in Maryland,” said Tom Phelan, President and CEO of Chesapeake Employers’ Insurance Company.

“Many injured workers get prescribed opioid painkillers to deal with the immense suffering that occurs

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from serious injuries,” Phelan said. “The problem occurs when some of the injured workers get addicted to these drugs. Opioid addiction prevents workers from returning to gainful employment, adversely affects families and home finances, and potentially harms children who find and use prescribed opioid painkillers meant for someone else. Furthermore, opioid addiction can lead to heroin use. This is a serious problem that negatively impacts all the citizens in Maryland.”

For more information on the prescription drug monitoring program, visit our page at <http://goo.gl/YOKpeB>. Anyone who is grappling with substance use addiction can find treatment options by calling our crisis hotline at 1-800-422-0009 or by visiting our page at <http://goo.gl/VwCBCB>.

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*The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is the state government agency that protects Maryland's public health. We work together to promote and improve the health and safety of all Marylanders through disease prevention, access to care, quality management, and community engagement. Stay connected: [www.twitter.com/MarylandDHMH](http://www.twitter.com/MarylandDHMH) and [www.facebook.com/MarylandDHMH](http://www.facebook.com/MarylandDHMH).*