

News You Can Use

Your monthly resource for news and information about behavioral health and intellectual/developmental disabilities in western North Carolina and beyond

CEO Spotlight with Smoky CEO Brian Ingraham



Raleigh, these days, is a very busy place. The hub of activity is the state Legislature, where the 2016 “short session” is in full swing. We’re watching closely as progress is made toward a final budget and other health-related bills. Here’s a sampling of what’s caught our attention:

Access to naloxone: We’re excited to see legislators throw their support behind a Senate bill that would make naloxone, which reverses opioid drug overdoses, available to the public, without a prescription, at pharmacies. The Senate passed the bill by a 49-0 vote on May 17. Last week, a House health committee unanimously recommended the bill, which now goes to a House committee before moving to the full House.

Since August 2013, naloxone has reversed more than 3,000 overdoses in the state, including reversals using the 2,600 naloxone kits Smoky contributed to N.C. Harm Reduction Coalition earlier this year.

State budget: There’s also room for optimism in this year’s version of the budget as drafted by the House. We’ve yet to see the Senate’s version, but the House budget includes restoring up to \$90 million of the \$263 million in previously cut LME/MCO “single stream” funding for uninsured and underinsured individuals. It

also includes an additional \$30 million toward the recommendations of the Governor’s Task Force on Mental Health and Substance Use, on which I served as a member and co-chaired the Workgroup on Prescription Opioid Abuse and Heroin Resurgence.

The details regarding how the potential restorations will be implemented are not yet entirely clear, but this is certainly good news. We are, of course, hopeful that these cuts will be scaled back to the fullest extent possible. We rely on state funds to pay for critical services for people who do not qualify for Medicaid. In April alone, state funding allowed us to serve more than 4,100 individuals – some of western North Carolina’s most vulnerable men, women and children with few other options for mental health, substance use and intellectual/developmental disability services.

Needle exchange: We are also watching a Senate bill to legalize syringe exchange programs in North Carolina. The bill’s co-sponsors, both Republicans and Democrats, say the [programs would reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis C](#), decrease chances of needle-stick injuries to police and EMS workers and encourage IV drug users to seek treatment. To date, the bill hasn’t gone far – it’s been held in a Senate committee since May 2.

Be sure to check out next month’s newsletter for updated information on these bills and more.