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TPCA Celebrates Tennessee's Expansion of Treatment for Worsening Opioid Crisis

Bill Brought by Sen. Steve Dickerson and Rep. Matthew Hill Will Save Lives

Nashville, TN – Tennessee is taking action to address the spike in opioid overdoses and make treatment for opioid use disorder more accessible. The General Assembly passed legislation yesterday after two years of deliberations and careful consultations.

The legislation was championed by [Senator Steve Dickerson](#) (R-Nashville) and [Representative Matthew Hill](#) (R-Elizabethton).

“As a physician, I understand the ramifications of opioid use disorder on Tennessee families and communities. I was proud to carry this legislation; it will extend access to quality, affordable treatment to thousands more Tennesseans each year and will help our state confront the opioid crisis,” says Senator Steve Dickerson.

“Today, thousands of Tennesseans need treatment for opioid use disorder but cannot access it due to a shortage of providers. This legislation will increase the number of providers that can offer safe, effective treatment and ensure that Tennesseans in hard hit communities across the state can access the care they need,” says Representative Matthew Hill.

Recent data illustrate the urgency of the General Assembly's actions. Opioid overdoses in our state's capital city, Nashville, have almost [doubled](#) since early March compared to the same period in 2019. Many other cities across Tennessee (including [Memphis](#)) report similar disturbing trends.

Currently, though, Tennessee does not have enough providers of [medication assisted treatment \(MAT\)](#). MAT is the [federally recommended](#), first-line treatment for most individuals with opioid use disorder. However, MAT is less available in Tennessee than in most states.

“Patients with opioid use disorder frequently call because they cannot find MAT providers who are able to accept additional patients, much less those without insurance or who may be unable to pay out of pocket. We just do not have the MAT capacity our region desperately needs,” says Brian Haile, CEO of [Neighborhood Health](#).

Tennessee had been the only state in the country that does not allow nurse practitioners to prescribe MAT. By enacting this law, legislators will now allow nurse practitioners and physician assistants at safety net providers to provide effective outpatient treatment for Tennesseans with opioid use disorder.

“This action was urgently need to address the overdose deaths we are now experiencing,” said Terri Sabella, CEO of [TPCA](#). “By expanding access to care specifically through safety net providers, legislators have ensured treatment will be safe and available to those most in need.”

“Community health centers are excited to be a part of the solution in addressing opioid use disorder in Tennessee; this legislation will allow my health center and others to provide treatment to more rural Tennesseans in need,” says Janie McGinley, CEO of [Lifespan Health](#).

Anyone with opioid use disorder may call the Tennessee [REDLINE](#) for help at 1-800-889-9789.

The Tennessee Primacy Care Association (TPCA) improves access to primary care through leadership, advocacy, and support as the voice of Community Health Centers. Member health centers serve more than 437,000 patients annually and continue to see their numbers grow. More information is available at <https://www.tnpca.org/>.

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