

Opioid Program Increases Access to Treatment Across the Commonwealth

Initiative reduced opioid prescriptions and cut emergency room visits in its first year

RICHMOND – Governor Ralph Northam announced Monday that Virginia’s signature Medicaid initiative for addressing opioid addiction and other substance use disorders has generated significant results in its first year, increasing access to treatment and reducing the burden on hospital emergency departments.

The Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) launched the ARTS program in April 2017. The program expands access to residential treatment for all Medicaid members, creates new care models combining medication with counseling and other supports, and offers training and financial incentives to increase provider participation.

“By expanding our network of providers who can treat addiction, Virginia’s Addiction and Recovery Treatment Services (ARTS) program has given us new tools to fight the opioid epidemic,” **said Governor Ralph Northam**. “If we expand our Medicaid eligibility to cover up to 400,000 more Virginians, as I have proposed, this initiative could save many more lives.”

“Nearly four in five drug overdose last year last year were caused by prescription opioids, heroin and fentanyl,” **said Dr. Daniel Carey, Secretary of Health and Human Resources**. “Individuals, families, and communities across the Commonwealth are counting on us to implement solutions like ARTS and bring them to scale in order reduce the human toll from these addictive drugs.”

The Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine’s Department of Health Behavior and Policy evaluated the results of the program’s first nine months, from April through December 2017. Highlights include:

- 16,600 Medicaid members received treatment for substance use disorder, a nearly two-thirds increase over the same nine months of the previous year.
- Of those, more than 10,500 members were treated for opioid addiction, a 51 percent increase from the same period of 2016.
- The total number of prescriptions for opioid pain medications for Medicaid members declined by nearly one third over the evaluation period.
- Hospital emergency department visits by Medicaid members due to opioid use declined by nearly one third, to 3,100 in the nine-month study period in 2017.

ARTS encompasses a variety of innovative strategies and new models of care that have significantly increased treatment capacity. Virginia was the fourth state to obtain permission from federal health officials to use Medicaid funds for residential treatment facilities with more than 16 beds, greatly increasing access to residential services. It is one of the first states in the nation to fully integrate its substance use treatment services into managed care plans along with physical and mental health services.

“Other states and national policymakers recognize the progress we are making in Virginia to develop innovative treatment and recovery solutions,” **said Dr. Jennifer Lee, DMAS Director.** “The new treatment models developed through the ARTS program are increasing access to services across the Commonwealth. Just as important, these new models are grounded in evidence-based practices that ensure the most effective care is available for our citizens.”

The ARTS program strengthened qualifications for providers and increased reimbursement rates for those who follow research-guided treatment regimens. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) offered extensive training to providers interested in participating in the ARTS program. The Virginia Department of Health Professions (DHP) assisted with implementation of regulations based on national opioid prescribing guidelines.

“Providers are responding to the critical need for addiction treatment,” **said Dr. Katherine Neuhausen, Chief Medical Officer for DMAS.** “Today, more than 350 new organizations are providing these life-saving services to Virginia Medicaid members. The number of outpatient opioid treatment services has increased from six to 108, including 79 office-based opioid treatment programs combining medication with counseling and other essential supports.”

For more information, please visit the Virginia’s Addiction and Recovery Treatment Services (ARTS) program [website](#).