

May 27, 2022: State Advocacy Update

Wisconsin jails and prisons take different paths to treatment for opioid use disorder

Individuals receiving medication for an opioid use disorder (MOUD) will be able to continue their treatment in Dane County, Wisconsin, according to a recently announced program by County Sheriff Calvin Barrett.

“As an addiction medicine physician, I am so happy to hear that the Dane County Jail will be supporting people with opioid use disorder to continue their life-saving medications while incarcerated,” Elizabeth Salisbury-Afshar, MD, MPH, told local reporters. “Medications for opioid use disorder help people to stop using illicit opioids, improve health, reduce risk of death, and increase retention in treatment.”

Elsewhere in Wisconsin, however, jail officials at another facility will require a soon-to-be-incarcerated patient with depression to bring his own supply of medicine if he wants to continue treatment, said Dr. Salisbury-Afshar. The jail also refused to continue the patient’s daily MOUD.

The AMA strongly urges all jails and prisons to ensure access to medically necessary care, including MOUD and other conditions when clinically appropriate and has model state legislation to help states require jails and prisons to do so.

“Wisconsin physicians recognize that there needs to be a partnership between the legal and medical system,” said Wisconsin Society of Addiction Medicine President Ritu Bhatnagar, MD, MPH. “There has been recent progress in Dane and Milwaukee Counties related to treatment when a person enters the carceral setting. We see that there is an opportunity to save lives during an overdose epidemic that is claiming thousands of lives in Wisconsin. Wisconsin physicians call on law enforcement to implement these measures statewide.”

The U.S. Department of Justice on April 5, 2022, issued guidance explaining that the Americans with Disabilities Act “protects people with OUD [opioid use disorder] who are in treatment or recovery from discrimination,” including DOJ actions to ensure the provision of MOUD in multiple settings, including jails and prisons.

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