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Maine Department of Corrections Announces Expansion of MAT Services

Augusta, Maine – The Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) announced today the expansion of the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) program for residents of State correctional facilities who have opioid use disorder (OUD).

The program, which began as a pilot in July 2019 in partnership with medical provider Wellpath, will expand this month, first by making more MDOC residents eligible for MAT and by expanding continuity of care services. By November MDOC will provide universal access to MAT among resident populations, regardless of sentence length.

This expansion builds on the MAT program initiated in July 2019 through an Executive Order from Governor Mills to combat the state’s opioid epidemic. The Executive Order prioritized the implementation of MDOC’s MAT services in an effort to reduce opioid related mortality among those individuals connected to MDOC.

“We knew the best way to save lives and help our residents get on a path to recovery was to offer MAT, the standard of care for OUD,” says **Deputy Commissioner Ryan Thornell** who is leading the efforts for the MDOC, working closely with **Maine’s Office of Behavioral Health Director, Dr. Jessica Pollard and Maine’s Director of Opioid Response, Gordon Smith**. “The key to beating this opioid epidemic is to offer quality treatment as soon as it’s needed. MDOC’s MAT program does just that, ensuring that individuals incarcerated can find recovery too,” says **Smith**.

The result of the Department’s 2021 expansion plan will be universal access to MAT for any MDOC resident identified as medically appropriate, regardless of their sentence length, a rarity in correctional settings.

“The significance of Maine’s expansion cannot be overstated,” says **Michael Botticelli, former director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy**. “It’s simple, access to treatment while incarcerated reduces mortality rates. All correctional settings should be working toward this. Maine will see the positive results of this unrestricted access, and I hope more correctional facilities follow suit.”

This month MDOC will begin a phased in approach to expanding the program. Every three months, from February until November, MDOC will induct a new cohort of residents meeting medical eligibility. Previously, MAT services were limited to only those residents 180 days to release. During this expansion the first cohort will be those residents with 12 months or less to release, the next cohort will be those with 18 months or less to release, followed by those with 30 months or less. By November 2021, anyone residing in a MDOC facility who medically needs medication for OUD will be able to receive it.

In addition, MDOC's MAT expansion will expand continuity of care, strengthening the process for ensuring individuals who come into the MDOC already using MAT are able to continue their treatment, including those individuals coming from county jails. Groups Recover Together, an outpatient opioid treatment provider throughout Maine and Day One, a substance use and mental health provider in Southern Maine, will continue to work alongside MDOC's program, linking residents, prior to release, to MAT providers and other recovery-based resources in local communities. An important part of the continuity of care is setting up community-based supports prior to release. Through a partnership with MaineCare, MDOC residents eligible for MaineCare benefits will have services activated immediately upon release. Residents ineligible for MaineCare have access to community treatment funding provided by the Maine Office of Behavioral Health.

“When we talk about a comprehensive approach to addressing OUD, this is what we're talking about,” says **Dr. Pollard of Maine's Office of Behavioral Health**. “A coordinated system ensures people receive the support they need, without gaps.”

In partnership with Groups Recover Together and Day One, MDOC's pilot program began with approximately 100 participants from across four facilities: Bolduc Correctional Center, a prerelease facility in Warren for men; Maine Correctional Center, a medium security custody facility serving men, the Women's Center located on the same grounds in Windham; and the Southern Maine Women's Re-entry Center, a prerelease facility in Windham. In addition to MAT, residents involved in the pilot program were trained to use and provided Naloxone upon release, a practice that will continue throughout the expansion. After seeing positive results among residents of the program including reduced cravings, reduced anxiety, increased interest in recovery, and positive results among those post release, including employment, safe housing, and continuation of active treatment, MDOC expanded the pilot to two additional facilities: the Mountain View Correctional Facility for minimum and medium custody males in Charleston, in November 2019, and the Maine State Prison, a maximum security male facility in Warren in February 2020. In February 2020 the Cutler Institute of the Muskie School of Public Services published an [evaluation of the MDOC's MAT pilot program](#). Outcomes from the Cutler report “indicate that overall the implementation of the Maine DOC MAT Pilot Program has been successful. Feedback from participants indicates that the program is meeting their treatment needs and has helped them to maintain access to care as well as sustain their recovery post-incarceration.”

Since the launch in July 2019, more than 500 men and women have released after successfully receiving MAT services while incarcerated in the MDOC.

“This is the right thing to do,” says **MDOC Commissioner Randall Liberty**. “We're so pleased by the partnerships and dedication among so many to make this expansion happen.”

On average, approximately 200 men and women are actively engaged with MDOC's MAT services on any given day.

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