



Pennsylvania
Department of Drug and
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MEDIA CONTACT: Stephany Dugan, ra-dapressoffice@pa.gov

Shapiro Administration's Warm Handoff Program Has Connected Nearly 68,000 Pennsylvanians with Treatment Services

Since Governor Shapiro took office, warm handoff programs have been operating in nearly 170 Pennsylvania hospitals and helped nearly 68,000 Pennsylvanians get into treatment – equivalent to the population of Columbia or Carbon County.

Lancaster, PA - Today, Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) Secretary Dr. Latika Davis-Jones announced the Shapiro Administration's [Warm Handoff Program](#) has connected nearly 68,000 Pennsylvanians with treatment and recovery supports immediately following an overdose or substance use crisis.

Right after an overdose survivor leaves the emergency department, there is often a high risk of a repeat overdose. The goal of DDAP's warm handoff program is to reduce that risk by providing a referral which directly transfers overdose survivors from a hospital emergency department to substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and resources.

"We're talking about expedient, appropriate, and seamless care for individuals who have overdosed – this is where the Shapiro Administration's warm handoff program comes into play," said Secretary Davis-Jones. "Providing door-to-door referrals, appropriate resources, and showing compassion at such a critical time can make all the difference in saving lives and leading individuals on a path to recovery."

Since Governor Josh Shapiro took office, warm handoff programs have been operating in nearly 170 Pennsylvania hospitals. A total of 93,400 warm handoff encounters - engagement with an individual for the purpose of assessing the need for SUD treatment – took place across these hospitals since the beginning of the Shapiro Administration resulting in 67,600 individuals being directly referred into treatment.

Somewhere to Go

The success of DDAP's Warm Handoff Program underscores the life-saving investments in [Governor Shapiro's 2026-27 budget](#) that support behavioral health services for all Pennsylvanians and the goal of having someone to call, someone to respond, and somewhere to go during a substance use and/or mental health crisis.

The 2026-27 state budget includes \$5 million to sustain walk-in behavioral health crisis stabilization centers, prioritizing regions with limited access to immediate, in-person care. The centers are typically open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are secure, no-appointment facilities that provide immediate mental health and substance use care.

"We are grateful for the Governor's commitment to behavioral health and for recognizing the

importance of sustained investment in programs that expand access to care, strengthen community partnerships, and improve outcomes for individuals and families across Pennsylvania,” said **Behavioral Health Service Line Director at Lancaster General Hospital Caroline Barnhart, LCSW**.

How a Warm Handoff Happens

When an individual has overdosed or has been admitted for other reasons and is identified as needing SUD treatment services, the following happens:

- Designated warm handoff staff talk with the individual about their desire to be assessed for SUD treatment services;
- If the individual accepts they are assessed through an in-person or virtual process;
- Following the assessment, the option for a referral to treatment is presented;
- If the individual accepts a referral, a referral is made to at least one of the following: treatment, recovery support, case management, or medication for SUD.

Over the last decade, DDAP has worked with stakeholders to ensure a seamless transition for overdose survivors accessing treatment. By partnering with all the Commonwealth’s local county drug and alcohol offices, known as Single County Authorities (SCAs), the [47 SCAs](#) have established DDAP-approved warm handoff programs with the hospitals in their county or respective coverage areas.

Warm handoff programs are operating at four Lancaster County Hospitals:

- Lancaster General Hospital
- Penn State Health Lancaster Medical Center
- UPMC Lititz
- WellSpan Ephrata Community Hospital.

During the Shapiro Administration, nearly **500 encounters** have occurred across the four county hospitals with over **300 individuals** accepting a referral for treatment, including overdose survivor Justin Dettinger who was helped through Lancaster General Hospital’s warm handoff program.

“I’m incredibly grateful for all of the professionals who participate in warm handoff programs and who have supported me throughout my journey of recovery,” said **Dettinger**. “Lancaster General Hospital’s program helped save my life.”

“Through the warm handoff program, overdose survivors in our emergency department are connected to both immediate medical care and coordinated referrals for substance use disorder treatment,” said **Dr. Kristi Dively, Addiction Medicine Physician at Lancaster General Hospital**. “Collaborative efforts like this - reducing stigma and increasing access to care - make a real difference for people in our community.”

To learn more about the Shapiro Administration’s overdose prevention and behavioral health efforts visit pa.gov.

EDITORS: Photos and video of the event are available through [PA Cast](#).

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