



To Address Burden of Overdose Deaths in Hawai'i, House and Senate Unanimously Pass Life-Saving Bill

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heather Lusk, Director, CHOW Project
(808) 393-4624 hlusk@chowproject.org
Carl Bergquist, Director, Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii
(310) 279-6025 carl@dpfhi.org

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The CHOW Project and the Drug Policy Forum of Hawai'i (DPFHI) applaud Hawai'i legislators for unanimously passing [SB 2392 \(SD2 HD3 CD1\)](#), a bill which creates immunity for health care professionals and pharmacists who prescribe, dispense, distribute, or administer [overdose reversal medications such as naloxone](#). The Harm Reduction Services Branch of the State Department of Health has also been instrumental in this multi-year endeavor. At a time of increasing overdose deaths in Hawai'i, the passage of this landmark bill will put this medicine in the hands of friends and family best positioned to save the lives of their loved ones.

[Naloxone is a non-narcotic opioid antagonist](#) used to blocks opioids, like heroin and oxycodone. It has no potential for misuse, and side effects are rare. When administered during an opioid overdose, naloxone blocks the effects of the drugs and restores breathing within 3 minutes. There have been over 10,000 overdose reversals using naloxone nationwide.

In the midst of a nationwide opioid epidemic, Hawai'i is now the 38th jurisdiction to pass a law that increases access to naloxone-type medication. This far-reaching bill also creates immunity for any person who administers this medicine to a person suffering from an opioid-related drug overdose, authorizes police, firefighters, lifeguards and all emergency medical technicians to administer the medication, requires Medicaid coverage for it, and allows harm reduction organizations like the CHOW Project to store and distribute them within the communities they serve.

“For every 164 of naloxone kits distributed, one life is saved. Hawaii now joins the majority of states in increasing access to this life-saving drug with the passage of this important legislation” stated Heather Lusk, Director of the CHOW Project. “Half of our participants have witnessed or experienced an

overdose in the past couple of years and now we can prevent overdose deaths with education and access to naloxone”.

The passing of this bill comes at a time of urgency for our state and the country at large. Not only has drug overdose been the leading cause of injury death for the past two decades for the entire United States, it was also the leading cause of fatal injuries in Hawai’i from 2010-2014—surpassing falls, motor vehicle, drowning and other injury-related deaths. In 2014, there were 155 deaths from drug poisonings/overdoses in Hawai’i, with a total of 1,465 over the past decade.

“With rare bipartisan support, [President Obama recently allocated over one billion dollars](#) in his budget to increase federal funding for overdose prevention. In other words, the timing of this legislation could not be better,” added Carl Bergquist, Executive Director of the Drug Policy Forum of Hawai’i. “Not only does it put necessary legal protections in place, but Hawai’i is more likely than ever to see the money we need to save the lives of those at risk and increase their treatment options.”

CHOW and DPFHI respectfully urge Governor David Ige to sign the bill into law without delay.