

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE, Mayor



**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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Members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
2471 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform:

I am writing to request your support in addressing the critical issue of the rising costs of the lifesaving drug naloxone.

Baltimore City has been at the forefront of the fight against addiction and overdose for decades. We have pioneered innovative and progressive programs to address this issue. Our city has sponsored needle exchange programs for over 20 years, training over 11,600 people in the recognition and naloxone treatment of heroin overdose events. Along with our behavioral health partner, Behavioral Health System Baltimore (for which I serve as Chair of the Board), we provide substance abuse and mental health treatment across the city.

Despite these efforts, Baltimore—like other cities around the country—is embroiled in the epidemic of substance addiction. We have an estimated 19,000 in our population of 620,000 who use heroin; many thousands more have other addictions. Last year, 303 people in Baltimore City died from drug and alcohol overdoses – 23 percent more than the number of who died in 2013. This is more than the number of people who died from homicide.

That is why we have launched the Baltimore Citywide Overdose Prevention and Response Plan. In just three months, we have increased our naloxone distribution by over 200%, with targeted training and distribution including in jails and in collaboration with our Police Department. We successfully advocated for changes in state law to allow for standing orders for naloxone prescription and instituted liability protection for prescribers.

However, with the increase in opioid overdose deaths, there has been an increased demand for naloxone. This increase in demand has been seized by some drug manufacturers as an opportunity to raise the price of naloxone and increase their profits. In the last year, the price of naloxone in Baltimore has more than doubled—this means we can only save half the lives of patients we were able to before.

Beginning on July 1st Amphastar Pharmaceuticals, a naloxone manufacturer, will once again be increasing the price of ten doses of the drug from \$299 to \$370. This cost reflects the 340-B federal discounted price; without the discount, the cost of the intranasal form of the drug is \$414. Each naloxone kit contains two doses of the drug plus supplies and will cost \$92 a kit following the proposed price increase. This recently proposed increase follows an adjustment that was made this past Spring from \$97 to \$299.

A doubling of the cost means that we will only be able to distribute naloxone to half as many individuals who need this life-saving medication. Now that we are about to have standing orders available beginning this October, we will have the ability to provide naloxone to a much greater number of people significantly increasing the number of lives saved. However, our ability to save lives will be limited by the dramatic increasing costs of the drug.

While naloxone is by no means the only answer to the opioid epidemic, and we also have to work to improve access to long-term addiction and mental health treatment, we have to save people's lives today in order for them to have the possibility of making better choices tomorrow. As a country, we need to eliminate barriers to naloxone access.

We thank you for your willingness to work together in addressing this issue. Thank you for your time and your continued support on behalf of the City of Baltimore.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Leana Wen".

Leana Wen, M.D., M.Sc.  
Commissioner of Health