



## **My Turn: A Good Samaritan law would save lives during opioid overdoses**

Jeffrey Singer

October 30, 2017

There is an undeniable opioid crisis in the United States — and Arizona is certainly not immune to its effect.

Last month, the Arizona Department of Health Services reported in its [Opioid Action Plan](#) that more than two Arizonans die each day from opioid-related overdoses. The number of deaths from heroin alone has more than tripled since 2012.

As policymakers tackle this urgent issue, it's important to not lose sight of the core principles of human dignity and individual liberty — and one proposal in the Action Plan that deserves applause for respecting these principles is the Good Samaritan Law for bystanders reporting an overdose.

Many who could save lives are drug users

Naloxone (Narcan) is an effective antidote to an opioid overdose; when given intravenously or by nasal spray, it works in minutes to reverse respiratory depression. It has been used in hospitals for decades to reverse opioid overdoses.

Since 2013, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has encouraged jurisdictions to equip first responders with naloxone and make it more available to other third parties — friends and relatives — who are likely to encounter an overdose victim.

As of July 2017, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have enacted such naloxone access laws. While these laws vary among states, they all make naloxone more available to third parties and first responders. In Arizona, pharmacists who have undergone appropriate training can prescribe naloxone, and many first responders carry the antidote.

Numerous reports have shown these laws save lives, but there's an obstacle blocking first responders. In many cases, a person wishing to report an overdose is also a drug user — in fact,

that person may have been using the drug along with the overdose victim. Fear of arrest for drug or paraphernalia possession prevents the friend from calling for help, and an opportunity to save a life is missed.

Studies show these laws work

To overcome this obstacle, many states have enacted Good Samaritan laws that assure people who report overdoses out of good faith will not be arrested or prosecuted when first responders arrive to help. All of these state laws share the goal of reducing overdose deaths by encouraging bystanders to call for help.

To date, 40 states and the District of Columbia have enacted Good Samaritan laws. Arizona is not one of them.

A 2011 University of Washington survey found 88 percent of drug users were more likely to summon emergency personnel during a drug overdose as a result of that state's good Samaritan law.

A June 2017 Cato Institute study that analyzed the effects of Good Samaritan and naloxone-access laws from 1999 to 2014 found that the two in combination led to a 9 to 11 percent decrease in opioid-related deaths, with no evidence that these laws increased recreational use of prescription painkillers.

While policymakers may disagree over the causes of the opioid crisis and strategies for addressing it, all share the goal of reducing overdose deaths. Naloxone is no magic bullet, but it has an ability to save lives — and it's not being used to its full potential.

A Good Samaritan law for overdose reporters will help Arizona's first responders carry out their lifesaving mission.

*Dr. Jeffrey Singer practices general surgery in Phoenix, is a visiting fellow at the Goldwater Institute, and a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute.*