

## Whitmer plans to cut opioid overdoses by 50 percent in five years

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Gov. Gretchen Whitmer wants to cut opioid overdoses by 50 percent in five years through medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to prison inmates and syringe exchange programs.

“Addiction is not a moral failing; it is a disease,” Whitmer said at a Thursday press conference in Lansing, adding the chronic disease can be prevented.

Inmates will have access to methadone, naltrexone and buprenorphine, drugs that bind opioid receptors and reduce opioid cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

Jeffrey A. Singer, senior fellow of Health Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank, told The Center Square that addiction specialists agree MAT has the highest success rate in treating opioid addictions and reducing overdoses.

Methadone, taken orally, is long-acting because it absorbs through the digestive system and won’t get the user high, depending on the user’s tolerance.

Singer argued that addiction is a disease characterized by “compulsive use despite negative consequences,” even if the addiction rips apart that person’s life.

Singer said drug abstinence as a solution to addiction has a 7 percent to 10 percent success rate.

Many prisons make inmates quit opioids cold-turkey, causing “horrible withdrawals,” Singer said, and inmates walk out of prison when released to find more heroin because their underlying addiction issues were never addressed.

That’s why MAT should be combined with therapy, Singer said.

An offender is 40 times to 120 more times likely to die of an opioid overdose within the first two weeks of their release, according to state-provided materials.

“When a person is addicted, they need help,” Singer said.

Nearly all addicts have a history of trauma, Singer said, and about 50 percent have a genetic predisposition to addiction, and roughly 60 percent have a psycho-neurologic co-morbidities, such as autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

A Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration report estimated 77 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals with an opioid use disorder relapse within three months of release with tragic results.

That's because those recently released from prison lost their drug tolerance but use the same dose as when they had a higher tolerance, Singer said.