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**ICYMI: MAYOR DE BLASIO AND FIRST LADY MCCRAY ISSUE A CALL FOR  
OTHER CITIES TO FOLLOW NEW YORK'S LEAD AND SAVE LIVES BY MAKING  
NALOXONE MORE READILY AVAILABLE IN *USA TODAY* EDITORIAL**

**De Blasio and McCray: We can save the lives of opioid addicts right now**

*New York sells naloxone antidote over the counter. The nation should follow suit.*

Prescription painkiller misuse and heroin addiction have become national public health crises. Addiction and deaths tied to opioids cut across economic and ethnic lines. Opioid misuse kills Americans of all ages — in small towns and rural communities from Alaska to the Deep South, and from the suburbs of Phoenix and inner-city of Baltimore to the shores of Staten Island.

Nearly 30,000 people died from opioid overdoses in 2014. Heroin overdoses have tripled in the last five years. In our city, a fatal heroin overdose happens every day of the year. They outnumber murders.

Lives, once filled with promise, are cut short. Families, once tightly bound, are left shattered.

As we rush our nation's public health and crime-fighting policies to catch up with reality, there is something we can do right now to save lives.

We can eliminate the prescription needed in most cases to possess and use an antidote, naloxone, capable of stopping a painkiller or heroin overdose in its tracks.

For those struggling with addiction, finding and affording a doctor's appointment is often an insurmountable barrier. The stigma surrounding addiction often makes users — or their loved ones — reluctant to consult a physician or seek a prescription.

Eliminating the need for a naloxone prescription will make it more likely heroin users themselves will be able to save a dying friend. It will make life-saving easier for family members and friends who suffer helplessly alongside lives at risk.

That is what we have done in New York City. Today, more than 650 pharmacies across our five boroughs offer prescription-free naloxone. Several states and a few cities have taken similar

steps, and pharmacies like CVS, Walgreens and Rite Aid have been crucial partners when local law allows.

Unfortunately, overdose victims and their families across the vast majority of the nation remain vulnerable today because of an unneeded prescription barrier and an outdated way of thinking about addiction.

That makes no sense.

Naloxone is safe and easy to administer — it's a simple injection or a nasal spray. It isn't addictive and it can't be used to get high.

Some critics believe that the availability of a drug overdose antidote will increase drug use. But this suggests that the disease of addiction is dictated by consequence rather than chemistry. Others say naloxone is a short-term solution to a multidimensional problem — and they're right. That's why in addition to using naloxone, we're dramatically increasing the number of people who can provide a separate medication to reduce opioid cravings. And that's why we're working so hard to close the treatment gaps preventing many from beating the grip of addiction. Naloxone helps keep people alive so that our other strategies to treat addiction can help them get healthy.

Naloxone is so safe — and so effective — that police departments from coast to coast are putting it on the belts and in the cars of their officers. It is saving lives every day.

Just as many communities have armed police officers with this overdose antidote, we must now equip the parents, friends and loved ones who live alongside substance misusers and who are most frequently in a position to give them a new lease on life.

To mayors, governors and public health officials facing the local consequences of a crisis crippling our nation: Issue orders to eliminate the need for a naloxone prescription and work with your local pharmacies to break down a barrier that is costing our communities lives. If you're a local official without the statutory authority to make this happen, demand your state legislature give it to you.

Imagine the relief of a mother or father who lives in constant fear of one day finding his or her child suffocating from overdose. Imagine being forced to help a girlfriend or boyfriend battle addiction without a tool that can give them one more chance for recovery. Imagine the feeling of knowing the death of your brother or sister could have been prevented — by you.

Families and loved ones across the country deserve this peace of mind and we have the power to give it to them. Those struggling with addiction deserve to know we care, and we have an obligation to prove it's true.

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