



CalOptima Health
A Public Agency
505 City Parkway West
Orange, CA 92868
☎ 714-246-8400
📞 TTY: 711
🌐 caloptima.org

CONTACT:

Janis Rizzuto
Director, Communications
jrizzuto@caloptima.org
714-246-8837

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CALOPTIMA HEALTH BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPROVES \$15 MILLION
TO FIGHT OPIOID OVERDOSE DEATHS IN ORANGE COUNTY**

Funds will put live-saving naloxone in members' hands

ORANGE, Calif. (August 8, 2023) — To protect members against the tragic effects of the opioid epidemic, CalOptima Health's Board of Directors has approved spending \$15 million from financial reserves to purchase and distribute life-saving naloxone. This unprecedented investment by a Medicaid health plan reflects CalOptima Health's commitment to combating the opioid epidemic on a local level.

Naloxone (brand names include Narcan and Evzio) is a medication administered as a nasal spray that can restore breathing while waiting for emergency personnel to arrive to deliver care. Overdoses can occur from opioids, such as fentanyl, heroin or prescribed opioid medications. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends administering naloxone to individuals in a potential overdose situation, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the first over-the-counter naloxone product in March.

“The fentanyl overdose epidemic can affect anyone in our community. Naloxone can make all the difference in an emergency situation, just like a defibrillator for cardiac arrest or epinephrine for an allergic reaction,” said Richard Pitts, D.O., Ph.D., CalOptima Health's Chief Medical Officer. “This funding enables CalOptima Health to create programs to put this life-saving medicine in members' hands when seconds count to save someone.”

As deaths from opioid overdoses increased over the past few decades, the U.S. declared the opioid epidemic a public health emergency in 2017. According to the Orange County Health Care Agency, the rate of deaths attributed to opioid overdoses in the county has nearly tripled between 2017 and 2021. In 2022, more than 100,000 deaths occurred in the United States.

CalOptima Health will use the Board-approved funding to purchase 250,000 doses of naloxone that will be distributed to members through targeted programs in development, including events held across the county. The agency will partner with community leaders, elected officials, health care providers and others to identify the most efficient and effective methods to achieve widespread distribution and raise awareness about naloxone use and administration, via programs beginning this fall.

###

About CalOptima Health

A county-organized health system, CalOptima Health provides quality funding health care coverage for low-income children, adults, seniors, and people with disabilities in Orange County, California. CalOptima Health's mission is to serve member health with excellence and dignity, respecting the value and needs of each person. CalOptima Health serves more than 988,000 members with a network of nearly 9,700 primary care doctors and specialists and 43 acute and rehab hospitals.