

Bloomberg announces \$50 million to fight opioid epidemic

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In this Nov. 29, 2018 file photo, former mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, speaks to the media in Jackson, Miss. Bloomberg's philanthropy has announced a \$50 million donation to help fight the nation's opioid epidemic. Bloomberg Philanthropies says over the next three years it'll help up to 10 states address the causes of opioid addiction and strengthen prevention and treatment programs. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

Former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's charity has announced a

\$50 million donation to help fight the nation's opioid epidemic.

Bloomberg Philanthropies said over the next three years it will help up to 10 states address the causes of opioid addiction and strengthen prevention and treatment programs. Its initiative involves a partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Pew Charitable Trusts, Johns Hopkins University and Vital Strategies.

Bloomberg said on Friday during his keynote address at The Bloomberg American Health Summit in Washington that he believes "we can turn the tide on this epidemic."

"And if we do," he said, "we can begin reversing the decline in life expectancy that has been happening across the country, thanks largely to opioid overdoses."

Pennsylvania will be the first state to get funding and will receive at least \$10 million. Pennsylvania had the highest number of drug overdose deaths in 2017 among all states and twice as many as in 2014. Nearly 5,400 Pennsylvania residents died of drug overdoses in 2017.

Pennsylvania's rate of 44.3 drug overdose deaths per 100,000 residents is more than double the national average.

Bloomberg has been considering a 2020 Democratic presidential bid, but a spokeswoman said there was "no stated link" between his political aspirations and the \$50 million investment to fight opioids.

Bloomberg's charity said CDC data shows there were more than 70,000 U.S. drug overdose deaths last year, including more than 47,000 from opioids, the highest numbers on record. It said those numbers are a leading factor in the decline of U.S. life expectancy over the past three years.

Bloomberg called the sobering numbers part of "a national crisis."

"For the first time since World War I, life expectancy in the U.S. has declined over the past three years—and opioids are a big reason why," he said. "We cannot sit by and allow this alarming trend to continue—not when so many Americans are being killed in what should be the prime of their lives."

He said in a statement he hoped his charity's work in Pennsylvania, one of the states hardest hit by the opioids crisis, would lay the groundwork "for more effective action across the country."

The partnership focuses on identifying new approaches to tackle opioids and plugging gaps in current treatment and prevention programs. Staff members from partner organizations will support state and local programs to reduce opioid-related deaths, and successful initiatives and guidelines will be replicated elsewhere, with the goal of creating a model for the rest of the nation.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf said he was "deeply grateful" for the financial and technical resources his state will receive through the partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies.

"From our first responders and health care professionals to teachers and social service providers, heroes across our commonwealth are saving lives and protecting residents in our communities every day from this awful scourge," Wolf, a Democrat, said in a statement issued by the Bloomberg charity. "We are doing everything we can to help them, and I am confident that this partnership will mark a turning point in our efforts."

The Drug Enforcement Administration said this month in its National Drug Threat Assessment that heroin, fentanyl and other opioids continue

to be the highest drug threat in the nation.

Bloomberg, who has been an independent, a Republican and a Democrat, declared lifetime allegiance to the Democratic Party and outlined an aggressive timeline for deciding whether to run for president in an interview with The Associated Press this month. He has regularly criticized President Donald Trump and spent a fortune to help elect Democrats in the midterm elections.

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