

BAKER APPEALS FOR STRONGER FEDERAL ROLE OPIOID ADDICTION FIGHT

ROXBURY, MASS., MARCH 21, 2016....Gov. Charlie Baker asked Monday for federal support to find the best ways to treat addiction.

Speaking at The Dimock Center, Baker told Congressman Joe Kennedy III he wanted the federal government to invest in research on how to support people in recovery in the community.

"We have not figured out how to organize, structure, or support the community piece that should be attached to all this," Baker said. Turning his attention to the Brookline Democrat, Baker said, "I would love to see the feds decide that they were interested in investing in the kind of research that they've done historically that has made such a difference in the way we think about and manage and organize our approaches as a country to so many different chronic conditions."

The governor said the National Institutes of Health and other arms of federal government could "really make a difference" in how people are served after they detox.

Baker, Kennedy, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and others attended the Breakfast of Champions event at the Roxbury health center while spring snow collected on the ground outside - closing schools in Boston and other places.

Providing substance abuse services among other offerings, The Dimock Center served 17,261 patients in fiscal 2015, according to its annual report.

Confronting addiction to heroin and prescription painkillers has been one of the chief tasks in Baker's first 15 months in office. The governor has signed four laws addressing the issue and said more must be done. Likening the challenge of opioid addiction to swimming across the Atlantic Ocean, Baker said, "We have a long, long way to go."

Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders said progress needs to be made on alternative pain treatment, removing barriers for people in recovery to obtain jobs and housing, and reducing stigma.

Baker recalled hearing from Aaron Chick, a recovering heroin addict, who told the governor last week, "I know what to do when things are bad," but "the piece that's missing is what do we do after?" "We have not figured that out," Baker said Monday.

Kennedy said federal funding can encourage states to develop prescription monitoring programs that can communicate across state lines, and he said the U.S. House has advanced a bill to increase funding for the National Institutes of Health. "The delegation's been a very strong supporter of increased NIH funding," Kennedy told the News Service.

After meeting with House and Senate leaders on Monday afternoon, Baker said he plans to include language in a supplemental budget bill about a report assessing the impact of the new opioid law, with recommendations for next steps to be completed after fiscal 2017.

Baker suggested the federal government could play bigger role around education and prevention with more funding for research of best treatment practices and training for prescribers. "They certainly have the ability to make the whole issue around opioid education as part of dental schools and medical schools and nursing schools a much bigger deal because they control the purse strings on a lot of that stuff," Baker said, referring to the federal government. Baker also said the National Institutes of Health and the Health Resources and Services Administration could put more backing toward treatment research. "They could really help us and help others in the provider community get a lot smarter about works on treatment," Baker said.