

# Pharma Kaleo donates overdose-reversing drugs to Alabama

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By MALLORY MOENCH  
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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A major pharmaceutical company previously criticized for inflating prices donated 1,744 doses of an overdose-reversing drug to Alabama’s volunteer rescue squads to combat the opioid crisis, the company announced Wednesday.

Kaleo Inc. donated of 872 boxes, which each hold two devices, to carry in state volunteer rescue vehicles, the company announced at a press conference at the Alabama Capitol.

The device called Evzio auto-injects the life-saving drug naloxone and contains a voice recording that talks an untrained non-medical professional through administering it.

“This is an unbelievable thing happening today, and it’s going to save many lives,” Republican state Sen. Gerald Dial said.

Dial said the donation will last Alabama three years. Kaleo Vice President of Corporate Affairs Mark Herzog didn’t commit to extending the grant at the press conference. Dial said he hoped the Alabama legislature would reach a more permanent solution before

the drugs run out.

Kaleo came under fire for raising the price of the prescription drug from \$690 per box in 2014 to \$4,500 in 2017. Last month the company said it would sell the drug for \$360 to government agencies.

Narcan, an alternative device that administers naloxone through nasal spray, costs less than \$150 for two doses.

There were 756 overdose deaths in Alabama in 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported. The state's overdose death rate spiked 82 percent over the last decade. CDC said 40 percent of overdoses nationwide are from prescription drugs.

Last year, Alabama had the highest national number of opioid prescriptions — more than the state's total population — according to a report by insurance provider Blue Cross Blue Shield.

“Opioid abuse is a tragedy that strikes close to the hearts of communities throughout Alabama, devastating families and destroying lives,” Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said in a written statement Wednesday. “One of our most valuable tools is to equip emergency responders with antidote medication that can be a matter of life or death for overdose victims.”

In December 2016, the Alabama Department of Public Health issued an order to ensure that naloxone is available to any person at risk of an overdose, even without a prescription for the drug.



Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey established a council to combat the opioid crisis in 2017. This year, the Alabama legislature voted into law one of the main recommendations of the council — criminalizing trafficking of fentanyl, one of the most powerful and lethal opioids. The law sets a mandatory minimum sentence for trafficking the drug based on weight.

The state will train local volunteer rescue squads to administer naloxone using the donated Evzio device starting Friday.

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