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# Baker would give hospitals the power to hold addicts

Opioid epidemic brings call for 'coerced treatment'



LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

**Staring down a brutal opioid epidemic, Governor Baker wants to give hospitals authority to force treatment on substance abusers.**

**By David Scharfenberg** | GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 11, 2015

Governor Charlie Baker, staring down a brutal opioid epidemic, wants to give hospitals new power to force treatment on substance abusers who pose a danger to

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hospitals the authority to hold addicts against their will for three days, evaluate them, and decide whether to seek legal permission for substantially longer commitments.

The proposal, modeled after existing rules for mental illness commitments, revives longstanding concerns about the ethics and efficacy of what is known among medical specialists as “coerced treatment.” But officials say it is an appropriate response to a deadly problem.

“We have a crisis on our hands,” said Marylou Sudders, Baker’s health and human services secretary. “You need all of the tools in the toolbox.”

The plan, which is still in draft form and subject to revision, comes amid mounting concern on Beacon Hill over an opioid scourge that left more than 1,200 dead from overdoses in Massachusetts last year. Lawmakers have approved new funding for treatment programs and are weighing a proposal to screen high school students for drug use.