

Tulane alumna appointed Pa. physician general

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Dr. Rachel Levine, an openly transgender woman, is Pennsylvania's new physician general. (Photo by Daniel Shanken, Reuters)

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf has appointed a Tulane University School of Medicine graduate as [the state's physician general](#). Dr. Rachel Levine was named to the position on Jan. 20 and approved by the state Senate in June. Levine was appointed for her impressive background but is a pioneer as well: She is the first transgender individual named to a gubernatorial cabinet post in Pennsylvania.

As physician general, Levine will advise the state's governor and secretary of health on medical and public health matters. This is her first role in public service.

"The biggest public health issue that we have in Pennsylvania is opioids. That includes prescription drug abuse as well as heroin use," Levine says, addressing her immediate goals. Last year, overdoses killed about seven Pennsylvanians a day ? and that's a conservative estimate, Levine adds. She will help guide efforts to prevent and treat opioid abuse, such as writing prescription guidelines and continuing medical education for healthcare providers, implementing a prescription drug-monitoring program and planning for the distribution of naloxone, a drug that can counteract overdoses.

Other health issues that Levine will tackle include improving immunization rates and preventing and treating Lyme disease.

Levine graduated from Tulane in 1983 and worked as a pediatrician, adolescent medicine specialist, and professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at the [Penn State Hershey Medical Center](#) for many years before her appointment. She specialized in treating young people with psychological issues like eating disorders. "My interest has always been where medical issues intersect with behavioral health issues," Levine says.

As a transgender woman, Levine adds that she is pleased to serve as a mentor and role model for the LGBT community, especially young people. "I think that that's an important role that I serve, but it's not the only role that I serve ? and not really the primary role. My role is to help the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with public health issues."

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