

Press Release

June 29, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACT:

Dr. Sharon Harris

516- 676-2008

safeglencove@yahoo.com

SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: NIDA Researchers Study COVID-19

The U.S. is now facing two intersecting health crises, the ongoing opioid overdose epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic. Each has the potential to exacerbate the effects of the other. In March, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) released a Notice of Special Interest to alert researchers with existing grant research funding that there is an opportunity to expand their scope of work to investigate aspects of COVID-19 as they intersect with substance use and related areas.

\$4 million in funding has been issued for COVID-19-related projects that could leverage current infrastructure, projects, or scientific knowledge and resources. Those projects range from assessing the virus's impact on individuals with a substance use disorder (SUD), including those who are homeless or incarcerated, to basic research to investigate potential interactions between drugs and COVID-19, including effects on the immune system. Since substance use may put people at increased risk for infection with SARS-CoV-2 or the most serious outcomes of COVID-19, several research projects will be assessing this. Smoking and vaping—both of nicotine and cannabis—may be risk factors that worsen COVID-19 outcomes, therefore researchers are examining COVID-19 in people who smoke and/or vape. A project at Boston University will use a method to study gene expression to examine whether smoking and vaping are risk factors for severe COVID-19 and its negative consequences to an immune system response that is fatal to some patients. Researchers funded by NIDA at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville studying the effects of text-messaging-delivered peer network counseling in young adults with cannabis use disorder will use supplemental funding to examine the impact of COVID-19 on health, smoking/vaping, and other substance use behaviors in this population.

The NIDA-funded National Drug Early Warning System (NDEWS) is a network of researchers at 18 sites across the country collecting and sharing data on drug use trends. With new supplemental funds, NDEWS will be expanding its efforts to track substance-use-related COVID-19 consequences in several urban, rural, and suburban areas with the help of local informants including funeral directors, emergency medical technicians, and staff at syringe services programs, to rapidly share the information gathered.

NIDA-funded researchers at the University of California-San Diego are looking at social networks, drug markets, and drug tourism among people who inject drugs in San Diego and Tijuana. Supplemental funds will enable them to expand their study to test this population for SARS-CoV-2 infection using nasal and fecal samples. This data will provide information about transmission of the virus among people who use drugs on both sides of the US-Mexico border and potentially inform policymakers about the impact of proposed mitigation strategies such as closure of the border.

Social distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus may lead to more individuals using drugs alone, raising the risk of overdose because bystanders may not be present to intervene or may be reluctant to intervene. Another project by researchers at New York University will study the effects of COVID-19 on opioid overdose risk behavior and how it is affecting access to and use of naloxone. The need for social distancing has increased the use of telemedicine and has resulted in the relaxation of rules governing the dispensing of controlled medications like methadone and buprenorphine. Building on their ongoing study of HIV/hepatitis and opioid prevention and treatment, supplemental funds will allow researchers at Oregon Health and Science University to examine how opioid treatment programs are implementing the new policy allowing four weeks' worth of take-home doses of methadone for stable patients (and two weeks' worth for others, based on clinics' discretion), as well as assess the effects of this change. The researchers will also analyze Medicaid claims to study COVID-19 diagnoses and estimate treatment burden among people with opioid use disorder.

Social distancing has also made it harder to access behavioral treatment and recovery supports.

NIDA research has already supported numerous devices and apps to help people with SUD connect virtually to peers and counselors, and some startups are adapting their innovations to address the COVID-19 crisis. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are using a NIDA supplement to adapt their ACHES smartphone recovery app to help users with social distancing, adjusting to isolation, and using virtual SUD treatment and recovery services. They will also assess the impact of their app on users' anxiety, loneliness, and reported COVID-19 infections.

COVID-19 has come to the United States already in the midst of the opioid crisis. NIDA's research on how these two epidemics will effect each other will support research in areas of basic science, prevention, treatment, epidemiology, and implementation, particularly at the intersection with SUD.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a United States federal-government research institute whose mission is to "lead the Nation in bringing the power of science to bear on drug abuse and addiction". For more information please visit www.drugabuse.gov.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled. "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid & COVID-19 Epidemics at www.safeglencove.org.

