

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: NIDA Overdose Death Harm Reduction Strategies

To address the overdose crisis in the United States, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has established a research network that will test harm reduction strategies in different community settings to inform efforts to help save lives. The harm reduction research network's efforts build on existing harm reduction research, and represent the largest pool of funding from NIH to date to study harm reduction strategies to address overdose deaths.

More than 107,000 people in the United States died from a drug overdose in 2021, according to provisional data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These deaths are largely driven by the proliferation of cheap, potent synthetic drugs like fentanyl contaminating the drug supply, including in heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and counterfeit pills.

Harm reduction is an evidence-based, often life-saving approach that directly engages people who use drugs to prevent overdose, disease transmission and other harms. Researchers will test strategies to connect enrolled participants who use drugs with services and treatments and measure the effectiveness of these interventions in reducing overdose deaths and other outcomes. Research to better understand how different harm reduction models may work in communities across the country is therefore crucial to address the overdose crisis strategically and effectively.

Funded by the NIH Helping to End Addiction Long-term Initiative, or NIH HEAL Initiative, through NIDA, the awards are expected to total approximately \$36 million over five years, pending the availability of funds. Studies will enroll participants to investigate a range of harm reduction approaches, such as distributing naloxone, a lifesaving medication to reverse overdose, and fentanyl test strips, which people can use to determine if drugs are contaminated with fentanyl.

The research network will also examine the efficacy of moving harm reduction services and tools into communities via mobile vans, peer support specialists, internet- and smartphone-based tools and other types of outreach. By offering these services, harm reduction may be a first step interaction that also helps people access treatment for addiction and other healthcare.

Novel forms of harm reduction services may prove helpful in rural areas of the country, where people may need to travel long distances to receive care and services. According to 2020 CDC data, rural counties experienced 26.2 overdose deaths per 100,000 people, which was only slightly lower than the rates in urban counties (28.6 deaths per 100,000 people); overdose deaths involving psychostimulants were higher in rural counties than in urban counties from 2012 through 2020. Additionally, several projects will be aimed at populations disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of drug use, including Black and Latino/Latina communities, and women. New York University School of Medicine, New York City is investigating the effects of a harm reduction intervention delivered via mobile van to Black and Latino/Latina participants who use drugs in New Haven, Connecticut, and the borough of the Bronx, New York. A community-based care coordinator will assess the unique needs of each participant (such as housing, food assistance, and mental health treatment) and then link them to appropriate services.

The NIH HEAL Initiative: The Helping to End Addiction Long-term® Initiative, or NIH HEAL Initiative®, is an aggressive, trans-NIH effort to speed scientific solutions to stem the national opioid public health crisis. Launched in April 2018, the initiative is focused on improving prevention and treatment strategies for opioid misuse and addiction, and enhancing pain management. For more information, visit: <https://heal.nih.gov>.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

NIDA is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug use and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy, improve practice, and advance addiction science. For more information about NIDA and its programs, visit www.nida.nih.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 Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org.