

NCDHHS Announces Grants For Treating Opioid Addicted Prisoners

By Administrator

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The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services today released a funding opportunity that will award a total of \$5.8 million to at least nine organizations statewide to increase access to high-quality opioid use disorder treatment for people in the criminal justice system. “The pandemic is shining a bright light on the substance abuse crisis in our country,” said Governor Roy Cooper. “We know that many people in our prisons need treatment and these resources will assist them in leading safe, productive lives when they re-enter society.” “The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly difficult for people who struggle with substance use disorders,” said NCDHHS Secretary Mandy K. Cohen, M.D. “This funding will connect people involved in the justice system to high quality treatment for opioid use disorder, helping us build a more resilient infrastructure for a stronger and healthier North Carolina.”

This program, made possible by an award from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance, is soliciting applications for the NC Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Site-Based Program, which will reduce opioid-related deaths, improve access to evidence-based treatment and reduce future criminal justice involvement among the people served by these programs. Organizations can apply for grants to establish or expand:

- Pre-arrest or pre-conviction diversion programs, such as Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD Programs) and Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiatives (PAARI), that divert people who commit low-level crimes to appropriate treatment options.
- Comprehensive jail-based medication assisted treatment programs that provide medication assisted treatment (MAT) during incarceration and connect people to continued treatment upon release. Comprehensive MAT programs, which include providing buprenorphine, methadone or both, are the gold standard for opioid use disorder treatment.
- Overdose prevention education and naloxone distribution upon release programs that engage people during incarceration and provides harm reduction education, including how to prevent overdoses, how to respond to an overdose and how to access community resources.

“We know people recently released from our prisons and jails are 40 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose compared to the general population,” said Kody H. Kinsley, NCDHHS Chief Deputy Secretary of Health. “We need to improve our ability to meet the

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needs of people involved in the justice system. It is critical to our opioid epidemic response and to help us achieve the goals outlined in our Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan. These strategies build a more resilient infrastructure for a stronger and healthier North Carolina.”

NCDHHS currently partners with the NC Department of Public Safety, law enforcement agencies and counties across the state to address the needs of persons with behavioral health, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders with several evidence-based practices, including Crisis Intervention Teams training for law enforcement, the Stepping Up Initiative, Sequential Intercept Mapping and Juvenile Justice Behavioral Health Partnerships.

These efforts are part of the state’s Opioid Action and Substance Use Plan to reduce overdoses in North Carolina. The plan lays out concrete strategies focusing on prevention, reducing harm and connecting people to care, which is more important now than ever before. While North Carolina saw a decline in unintentional overdose deaths in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 this rate surged forward with nearly three thousand overdose deaths across the state.

In late 2020, NCDHHS released the Opioids & COVID: Supporting Justice-Involved Individuals with SUD during COVID’s request for applications, which was awarded to 17 local partnership-based programs delivering pre- and post-arrest diversion programs, opioid use disorder treatment at jails and re-entry planning programs.

Together these funding opportunities represent an \$15 million investment by NCDHHS to build the capacity needed to improve access to care for people in the justice system. The NC Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Site-Based program will empower some existing programs to offer more services to more people, while also providing the necessary resources to bring many of these services to areas which previously lacked access to them.

The applications for funding under this program are available at www.ncdhhs.gov/about/grant-opportunities/mental-health-developmental-disabilities-and-substance-abuse-services-grant-opportunities.

Full details on the application and performance timeline, eligibility criteria for applying, and

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allowable uses of program funds can be found in the formal request.