



# Foundation *for* Opioid Response Efforts

## **Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE) Announces Grants to Urgently Increase Access to Recovery Support Services for Opioid Use Disorder During COVID-19**

**First Wave of Funding to Organizations on the Frontlines of the Opioid Crisis Amid Pandemic to Connect At-Risk Minority, Low-Income, Rural, and Justice-Involved Communities to Vital Services**

**Funding Will Also Enable Analysis of the Impact of Temporary Changes in Care Delivery Policy**

**NEW YORK (July 23, 2020)** The [Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts \(FORE\)](#) today announced it is providing grants to six organizations nationwide to help them respond to increased risks faced by individuals with opioid use disorder and an alarming increase in overdoses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of FORE's COVID-19 National Emergency Response effort, this funding is earmarked to (1) expand access to recovery programs safely during the pandemic, and (2) support policy research to learn from temporary changes in policy, such as relaxed telehealth regulations.

Maintaining connections is especially important for people in recovery from opioid use disorder. Recovery support services, which so often rely on face to face interactions, have had to rapidly transition to virtual means in order to maintain supports for individuals in treatment and recovery who may need these services more than ever due to isolation, as well as economic and environmental stresses related to the pandemic.

The funded organizations include: [Ballad Health](#), [RAND Corporation](#), [Addiction Policy Forum](#), [Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics](#), [Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey](#), and [University of North Carolina \(UNC\) Health Sciences at Mountain Area Health Education Center](#). This first wave of COVID-19 response funding is for a host of virtual interventions and creates opportunities to inform future programs to address the opioid crisis beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grants to Ballad Health and Addiction Policy Forum are the first awards from a current, ongoing FORE request for proposals focused on recovery support services during the coronavirus pandemic. Grants to RAND and Rutgers will support analysis of the impact of temporary emergency policy changes to inform longer-term care improvements. Grants to the Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics and UNC Health Sciences at Mountain Area Health Education Center will allow these organizations to strengthen their abilities to provide treatment and training services during the pandemic.

“Before the onset of COVID-19, opioid use disorder was at unprecedented levels, with an estimated 130 Americans dying every day from an opioid overdose. Now we’re looking at one crisis on top of another since evidence suggests that many of the stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic are already leading to a rise in opioid overdoses and deaths,” said Andrea Barthwell, M.D., Chair of FORE’s Board of Directors. “These grants to leading organizations on the frontlines of the opioid crisis are aimed at breaking through many of the COVID-19 imposed barriers by providing solutions that make it easier to connect those seeking care to evidence-based recovery services.”

The funding will also support evaluations of the various virtual treatment and medication management programs organizations put in place during the coronavirus pandemic to determine best practices and develop long-term strategies.

“COVID-19 has led to implementing a number of virtual innovations in evidence-based treatment for opioid use disorder. Now we must determine which of those changes are working, and for whom, so we can develop long-term policies that sustain access to better patient-centered care,” said Karen A. Scott, M.D., M.P.H., President of FORE. “As we evaluate and test new strategies to effectively treat and reduce opioid use disorder, we do so with the added mandate to address and remove racial and ethnic barriers magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic and recent events.”

### **Working with At-Risk Populations in Rural Communities and Correctional Facilities**

Ballad Health is helping to reduce COVID-19-specific barriers to opioid use disorder recovery support through its PEERhelp program, which currently provides virtual recovery resources through a phone warmline on weekdays in 21 counties throughout Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. The warmline is staffed by peers with lived experience who must complete 500 hours of training to become a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS).

With the additional funding from FORE, Ballad Health will be able to expand its PEERhelp Warmline to 24/7 coverage and increase the number of its weekly virtual

recovery meetings. The extra support will also help Ballad Health continue to make inroads into local prisons by increasing the number of virtual peer support meetings offered and creating opportunities for incarcerated individuals who volunteer for the PEERhelp Warmline to receive training and CPRS certification post-release. Lastly, by providing added flexibility and new dual-state CPRS certification opportunities, Ballad Health will be able to engage new warmline volunteers to enhance its care continuum in both remote rural areas and the criminal justice system.

### **Expanding Access to Effective Digital Services in Justice Settings**

Justice-involved individuals with opioid use disorder face additional barriers to service access given criminal justice settings' persistent gaps in treatment. Faced with the constraints of COVID-19, drug courts and diversion programs now cannot direct participants to usual recovery services, and many are looking for alternative solutions. With the help of FORE funding, Addiction Policy Forum (APF) will be able to expand access to evidence-based recovery services to individuals in criminal justice settings, such as drug courts and diversion programs. Through its Connections mobile app, a toolkit of virtual evidence-based behavioral health interventions and support demonstrated in clinical trials to improve patient outcomes, APF will provide a suite of effective and valuable resources customized to this high-risk population and will offer services otherwise unavailable because of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on in-person programs.

### **Assessing New Telemedicine Services**

To reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission, relaxed Federal regulations made it possible for opioid use disorder treatment providers to transition from in-person care to telemedicine. Funding from FORE is enabling the RAND Corporation to conduct a qualitative, national study to assess the various telemedicine programs quickly implemented at opioid treatment programs (OTPs). The study will explore the scope of services offered, possible barriers to treatment, and plans for the future. The results of this study will help both inform ongoing telemedicine programs and provide lessons learned to providers that have yet to make the transition to telemedicine. The longer-term goal of this study is to help guide policy decisions about opioid use disorder treatment and care delivery beyond the current health emergency.

### **Learning from Temporary Medicaid Changes Under the Public Health Emergency**

Support to Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, will expand their current FORE-funded project assessing the impact of innovative Medicaid policy changes in New Jersey on access to opioid use disorder treatment. This additional funding will help their efforts to evaluate the temporary regulatory and policy changes that have been enacted during the COVID-19 public health emergency, including expanding use of

telemedicine and changes to medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) prescribing rules. Data analyses will also provide information on the risks to the population with opioid use disorder, including racial and ethnic disparities, during the pandemic.

Two of the organizations included in FORE'S COVID-19 Emergency Response, the Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (IAFCC) and UNC Health Sciences at Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC), received support prior to the pandemic to work on projects that aim to improve access to opioid use disorder treatment. The additional funds will support their efforts to continue carrying out their access projects within the constraints of COVID-19. Additional grant funds to IAFCC will support implementation of telehealth services at the free clinics involved in developing MOUD programs. The grant to UNC-MAHEC will enhance their ability to engage community health centers throughout North Carolina in MOUD education and provider training.

Grants in this wave of COVID-19 response funding total \$333,642. Additional grants are anticipated in the months ahead. To date, FORE has awarded \$10.5 million in grants to organizations across the country to improve access to opioid use disorder treatment.

For more information on the COVID-19 grant recipients, click [here](#).

### **About FORE**

The Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE) was founded in 2018 as a private 501(c)(3) national, grant-making foundation focused on addressing the nation's opioid crisis. FORE is committed to funding a diversity of projects contributing solutions to the crisis at national, state, and community levels. FORE's mission is to convene and support partners advancing patient-centered, innovative, evidence-based solutions impacting people experiencing opioid use disorder, their families, and their communities.

**Source:** Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE)

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