



Initiative to Get COVID-19 Vaccines to People with Substance Use Disorder Launched by Addiction Policy Forum (APF) and Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE)

Addressing Access and Vaccine Hesitancy Among a Vulnerable Population

New York & Bethesda, March 23, 2021 – In a major effort to get COVID-19 vaccines to one of the most vulnerable populations, the Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE) and the Addiction Policy Forum (APF) are launching a program to assist people with substance use disorder obtain COVID-19 vaccinations. The initiative was announced today during a [webinar](#) on addiction, COVID-19 and vaccines featuring Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Nora Volkow, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and Jessica Hulsey, Founder and CEO of Addiction Policy Forum.

The program, which is funded by a grant of \$125,843 from FORE, will provide trained “vaccine navigators” to help schedule vaccine appointments and address concerns about taking the vaccine among people with substance use disorder over the next few months. Assistance will be provided to people who have a substance use disorder, including those in treatment or in recovery, as well as for their family members or other caregivers.

“The development of highly effective COVID-19 vaccines brings significant hope to ending the pandemic, but only as people get vaccinated,” said Dr. Karen A. Scott, President of FORE. “This project will use a two-pronged approach to reach people with substance use disorder who want the vaccine as well as those who say they are hesitant.”

According to a recent APF [study](#) that examined COVID-19 vaccine readiness among people with substance use disorder, nearly half (47%) of the participants reported they were unwilling to take a COVID-19 vaccine. This is despite research demonstrating that people with substance use disorder may be at higher risk for contracting COVID-19 and may face more severe outcomes than the general population.

At the same time, people with substance use disorder who want the vaccine often face extraordinary challenges to obtain it, including lack of awareness of eligibility rules that vary state to state and difficulties using complex online scheduling systems. There may also be issues involving lack of transportation to get to vaccination sites, work schedules, limited access to computers or smartphones, and concerns about stigma.

“With the anxieties of the pandemic on top of the stress and difficulties managing a substance use disorder or caring for a loved one who has a substance use disorder, providing a simplified approach to scheduling vaccine appointments as well as health and wellness information about the vaccines will be a critical resource for patients and their families,” shared Ms. Hulsey.

Through the new program, vaccine navigators will help people with substance use disorder find vaccination sites, identify appointment availability, and schedule appointments in their area if needed. People will be able to access the navigators through multiple means, including via APF’s helpline, website, Connections App, and newsletter. Vaccine navigators will also provide free, confidential support, evidence-based information, and connection to local addiction treatment and recovery resources to individuals who seek it.

To help address the high rates of vaccine hesitancy among people with substance use disorder, vaccine navigators will conduct outreach to provide information and resources to address concerns among those who are not ready to schedule an appointment.

“With its 50 state chapters, justice-focused projects, and network of more than 200 programs and community-based agencies across the country, including on the ground partners engaged with underserved people in the Black, Latinx, LGBTQ, and tribal communities, APF is well positioned as a trusted resource to be a bridge between people with substance use disorder and COVID-19 vaccines, said Dr. Scott. “We are proud to partner with them in this important initiative and hope that it may serve as model for providing preventive healthcare services and education to this vulnerable population in the future.”

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 support partners advancing patient-centered, innovative, evidence-based solutions impacting people experiencing opioid use disorder, their families, and their communities. Through convening, grantmaking and developing informational resources, FORE seeks to bring about long-term change. To date, FORE has awarded 41 grants totaling \$12.6 million.

ABOUT ADDICTION POLICY FORUM

The Addiction Policy Forum is a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating addiction as a major health problem. Created to serve patients and families impacted by the disease of addiction, the organization works to end stigma, help patients and families in crisis, improve treatment and prevention, and translate the science around addiction. For more information, visit: www.addictionpolicy.org.

Sources: Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts and Addiction Policy Forum

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