



Foundation *for* Opioid Response Efforts

Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE) Announces Grants Totaling \$1.3 Million to Assess Impact of COVID-19 on Opioid Use Disorder Treatment and Equity

Funding to Identify Best Practices and Shape Federal and State Policies Moving Forward

NEW YORK (March 16, 2021) -- The coronavirus pandemic has led to several temporary regulatory relaxations and policy innovations in treatment for opioid use disorder aimed at making it easier for those seeking care to access treatment without risking in-person interactions. The Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE) today announced it is providing grants totaling \$1.3 million to six organizations to assess the impact of these temporary measures and inform future policies to improve access and promote equity for the treatment of opioid use disorder.

“Temporary policy changes related to opioid use disorder treatment include the use of telehealth, allowing for take-home methadone doses, and alterations in toxicology screening,” said Karen A. Scott, MD, MPH, President of FORE. “We have a short window of time to determine which policy changes are working to improve access, and how these policies improve or lessen equitable access to care, so we can develop longer term, evidence-based policies that sustain access to better care beyond the pandemic.”

The funded organizations are: Bipartisan Policy Center, RAND Corporation, University of Pittsburgh, New York University (NYU) Grossman School of Medicine, University of Arizona, and RTI International (RTI).

Informing Federal Efforts to Combat the Opioid Crisis

Opioid related overdoses and deaths continue to be one of the nation’s leading public health crisis. The latest provisional data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates an increase in overdose deaths during the pandemic, estimating over 81,000 drug overdose deaths from May 2019 to May 2020, the highest number ever reported in a 12-month period. Congress has invested billions of dollars in funding to tackle the opioid crisis, but despite these efforts, drug overdose mortality rates continue to rise—and have accelerated even faster during the pandemic.

With FORE’s support, the **Bipartisan Policy Center** will establish an *Opioid Crisis Task Force*, comprised of leading experts and former federal and state officials to develop bipartisan recommendations for Federal policies to drive down overdose death rates.

Funding: \$250,000
Project: Launching the Opioid Crisis Task Force
Leader: Anand K. Parekh, MD, MPH, FACP

RAND Corporation will evaluate changes in buprenorphine prescribing, a gold standard medication for opioid use disorder, and how these changes may have affected access to care and treatment outcomes among underserved populations, including Medicaid beneficiaries and rural populations. This analysis can help guide decisions about whether to continue, amend or discard relaxed prescribing policies put in place during the pandemic to improve future access to treatment.

Funding: \$358,422
Project: Buprenorphine Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Leader: Bradley Stein, MD, PhD

Learning from State-wide Experiences

The University of Pittsburgh, NYU Grossman School of Medicine, and the University of Arizona will assess the impact of COVID-19 measures on providers and at-risk opioid use disorder populations in Pennsylvania, New York, and Arizona.

In 2017, Pennsylvania designated 45 primary care providers, hospitals, community health centers, and substance use disorder treatment providers as *Centers of Excellence for Opioid Use Disorder*. The **University of Pittsburgh** will examine how providers at these whole person, integrated care centers implemented COVID-19-policies related to providing medications for opioid use disorder and telehealth services. The project will look at the impact of temporary COVID-19 policies on opioid use disorder treatment, workforce morale, and patient outcomes.

Funding: \$100,000
Project: COVID-19 Policy Effects on Opioid Use Disorder Patient Services at the Pennsylvania Centers of Excellence
Leaders: Antoine Douaihy, MD and Janice Pringle, PhD

NYU Grossman School of Medicine will look at how temporary COVID-19 policies and changes have affected opioid use disorder treatment, particularly for Black and Latinx patients, at 660 addiction outpatient and opioid treatment programs (OTPs) across New York State. There will be an analysis of which clinics have been able to adapt and continue providing high quality care, which have not, and how different patient populations have been affected.

Funding: \$274,999
Project: Responses of Addiction Treatment Programs to COVID 19 - Impact on Disparities in Treatment Access and Quality
Leader: Thomas D'Aunno, PhD and Charles Neighbors, PhD

The **University of Arizona** will evaluate how providers in Arizona implemented COVID-19 policies related to providing medications for opioid use disorder and telehealth. This project will

include a focus on access issues facing tribal, rural, and remote communities, as well as other communities of color.

Funding: \$230,357

Project: Evidence for Action - COVID-19 as a Window of Opportunity to Normalize Medications for Opioid Use Disorder Access

Leader: Beth Meyerson, MDiv, PhD

Measuring Results to Define Strategy

In 2020, FORE provided nine [Recovery Support Services](#) grants to organizations around the country as part of the foundation's rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to help address the impact of social distancing restrictions on opioid use disorder recovery efforts. RTI will evaluate the extent to which grantees were able to preserve access to recovery supports with social distancing requirements in place. An understanding of how, under what conditions, and among whom were the innovative approaches to recovery support services most effective will help develop promising strategies to address the opioid crisis long term.

Funding: \$125,621

Project: Evaluation of FORE's COVID-19 National Emergency Effort

Leader: Jessica Cance, PhD, MPH and Phillip Graham, DrPH, MPH

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.

Source: Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE)

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