News

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New Jersey Department of Health Announces Overdose Study Grant Opportunities for Local Health Departments

Today the New Jersey Department of Health released a Request for Applications from local health departments for funding to help them study patterns of overdose in their communities to better inform preventive and recovery initiatives. Local health departments (LHDs) are eligible to receive grant awards of $100,000 to establish Overdose Fatality Review Teams (OFRTs).

In 2019, New Jersey lost nearly 3,000 individuals to the overdose crisis, almost 8 lives a day.

“The Department recognizes the importance of local solutions to bring about a larger change that is needed to address the overdose crisis,” said New Jersey Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli. “The power of Overdose Fatality Review Teams is that they combine robust data with local partnerships, which is the perfect public health recipe for success. These teams will bring about innovation to help end the overdose epidemic.”

The OFRTs allow communities to analyze and better understand the circumstances surrounding fatal overdoses. If local health officials know more about how the epidemic is affecting their communities, they can more effectively direct policies, practices, and partnerships to prevent future overdoses and allocate prevention resources and services where they do the most good. This funding is made available through the CDC Overdose Data to Action Grant, for which the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) is a recipient.

The grants awarded from this RFA will enable Local Health Departments to establish multi-agency/multi-disciplinary, countywide OFRTs to analyze data, identify regional trends and evaluate strategies to decrease opioids deaths (funding is available for up to eight LHDs, $100,000 each).

The Grants will also be used to support Local Health Departments that have already established OFRTs to enhance their current operations and spread best practices across the state (funding is available for two established OFRTs at $100,000 each).

OFRTs will:

- Conduct multi-agency/multi-disciplinary reviews of all available information on an individual who dies from an overdose; promote cooperation and coordination across agencies involved in overdose investigations;
- Establish policies and procedures for pooling all available information on overdose deaths from local, county, and state government agencies, law enforcement, private entities that maintain privacy and confidentiality and comply with all applicable State and Federal privacy and confidentiality legal requirements;
- Identify points of contact between deceased individuals and healthcare, social services, criminal justice and other systems involved;
- Identify the risk factors that put individuals at risk for drug overdose within their jurisdiction,
- Recommend how to improve local partnerships, policies and practices to prevent overdose deaths.

“Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department is concerned that the overdose epidemic will not only persist but will worsen. Social isolation, grief and job loss are just some of the factors that could contribute to a possible increase in deaths,” added Persichilli. “The Department of Health continues to be vigilant in monitoring overdose data and promoting access to treatment and care.”

Based on the Maryland Localized Fatality Review Teams (LOFRTs) model and in consultation with the expertise of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Program, OFRTs are multi-agency/multi-disciplinary teams assembled to conduct ***confidential*** reviews of multiple individual overdose death cases in

compliance with all applicable State and Federal privacy and confidentiality legal requirements. In Maryland, OFRTs improved the quality of referral systems, enhanced outreach to families to provide overdose prevention and treatment services by local health departments and other providers; identified new audiences for Overdose Response Program (naloxone) trainings; and amplified overdose awareness.

Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New Jersey Division, Susan A. Gibson said, "The DEA and HIDTA continues to strengthen its public safety – public health partnership with the NJ Department of Health and community-based entities in identifying strategies to reduce the number of drug related deaths. This multi-agency approach is paramount in addressing a very complex problem that has devastated our communities. Through this comprehensive analysis lives can be saved."

LHDs who are interested in applying for the RFA must submit a letter of intent submission by June 29. Applications may be submitted between July 6 to August 3. NJDOH will inform grantees of awards on August 18. The anticipated start date of the grant is October 1, 2020 and the anticipated end date is September 30, 2021.

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