

Governor Cooper Announces \$6.5 Million In Grants For Partnerships To Combat Opioid Epidemic

By Administrator

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A new federal grant will help North Carolina partner with local justice systems — including local law enforcement, courts and others — to prevent opioid overdoses and connect people to treatment. Governor Roy Cooper announced today that the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) was awarded \$6.5 million over the next three years by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance. “Data shows the best way to combat the opioid epidemic is expand access to health care, and these funds will help do that,” said Governor Roy Cooper.

NC DHHS will award funds to a minimum of nine sites to implement evidence-based programs for people involved in the justice system based on a competitive application process. Specifically, the funds may be used to implement:

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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.

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Comprehensive jail-based medication assisted treatment programs 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.

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Overdose prevention education and naloxone distribution upon release engages 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.

This grant will allow North Carolina to expand programs that have been proven to work. Currently only two jails (Durham and Buncombe) in North Carolina provide comprehensive medication assisted treatment, which NCDHHS supports through its State Opioid Response grant funding. North Carolina has 11 cities or counties with pre-arrest diversion programs.

“We have seen the success of MAT in our experience as the first detention facility in the state of North Carolina using this national best practice,” said Major Elijah Bazemore, Program Administrator at the Durham County Detention Center. “Sheriff Birkhead has welcomed recent federal assistance for our comprehensive MAT program, including all three FDA approved medications. We look forward to expanding our partnership with the state to save lives and

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reduce recidivism.”

“Addressing the needs of justice involved individuals is critical to our opioid epidemic response and to help us achieve the goals outlined in our Opioid Action Plan said Dr. Mandy Cohen, Secretary of Health and Human Services. “These strategies help us reduce the overdose burden in a vulnerable population, and by integrating evidence-based treatment into the justice system, they 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/developmental disabilities and substance use disorders with several evidence-based practices, including Crisis Intervention Teams training for law enforcement, the Stepping Up Initiative (including Sequential Intercept Mapping) and Juvenile Justice Behavioral Health Partnerships.

These efforts combined with other initiatives outlined in the state’s Opioid Action Plan, focus on prevention, reducing harm and connecting people to care. For the first time in five years the number of unintentional opioid-related overdose deaths among North Carolina residents has fallen. According to preliminary data collected by the NCDHHS, unintentional opioid-related overdose deaths decreased by 9 percent from 2017 to 2018.

“While we have seen some important progress in our opioid epidemic response, people recently incarcerated in North Carolina prisons are 40 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose in the first two weeks after release” said Dr. Elyse Powell, State Opioid Coordinator “The strategies funded through this grant will expand access to treatment and prevent overdoses in a critical population.”

NCDHHS will develop a request for applications to competitively award funds for the strategies approved under this award. Further information about the forthcoming RFA is available [HERE <https://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=38109465&msgid=467558&act=E9NM&c=1346310&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ncdhhs.gov%2Fabout%2Fgrant-opportunities%2Fmental-health-developmental-disabilities-and-substance-abuse-services-0>](https://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=38109465&msgid=467558&act=E9NM&c=1346310&destination=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ncdhhs.gov%2Fabout%2Fgrant-opportunities%2Fmental-health-developmental-disabilities-and-substance-abuse-services-0) .