

NEWS

SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AWARDS GRANT TO ASSIST IN REDUCING OVERDOSE DEATH DISPARITIES

As part of ongoing investments, the Homeless Children's Network will provide services to lessen harmful health outcomes associated with substance use disorder

December 13, 2023

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) has awarded a \$2.25 million grant to the Homeless Children's Network (HCN) as part of an ongoing investment and commitment to reducing racial disparities in drug overdose deaths through prevention, engagement and education.

This grant funding, which will be allotted as \$450,000 per year over five years, will help expand the capacity of HCN, a San Francisco community-based organization, to prevent and lessen harmful health outcomes associated with substance use, and to reduce overdose death disparities through innovative, tailored approaches. Funding for the grant comes from opioid settlement funds and state Mental Health Services Act funds and is the first of several investments SFDPH intends to make in the Black/African American community to address drug overdoses. SFDPH recognizes the breadth and depth of this crisis in the Black/African American community necessitates meaningful and sustained support.

Black/African Americans in San Francisco experience fatal overdoses at 5-times the city-wide rate. This community partnership funding aligns with the SFDPH goal to reduce racial disparities in fatal overdose among Black/African Americans.

“The racial disparities within drug overdose deaths in San Francisco are unacceptable and the community wants to be part of the solution,” said SFDPH Deputy Director of Health Naveena Bobba. “We know that when we work with partners that are embedded in the community, the impact is greater.”

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“No single organization or individual can make a meaningful impact on this crisis without a multi-year, robustly funded investment in a citywide community driven collaboration,” said Dr. April Y. Silas, Chief Executive Officer of Homeless Childrens Network. Recognizing the magnitude of the overdose disparities in the Black/African American community, SFDPH has adopted a multifaceted approach that focuses on various key areas, including community outreach and engagement, developing culturally congruent services, and capacity building. This will be the focus of some of the overdose prevention work HCN will provide.

“There is a generational impact of substance use disorder and overdoses,” Dr. Silas said. “For every one adult we lose, many people, including children, are impacted.” According to Dr. Silas, the organization approaches overdose prevention work with love, skill and a cultural perspective. “We need culturally congruent programs that mitigate the harm to the individual, the family and the community.”

A primary goal for SFDPH is to collaborate with and empower the Black community in overcoming disparities. To strengthen these efforts the Office of Overdose Prevention staff have provided Overdose Recognition and Response training to several community-based organizations (CBOs) that primarily serve the B/AA community. This training equips staff with the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to overdose situations effectively. By empowering these organizations, their capacity is strengthened to support individuals and family members effected by substance use.

Dr. Hillary Kunins, Director of Behavioral Health Services and Mental Health SF, said the organization brings longtime experience and leadership to work that addresses racial disparities. “The Homeless Children’s Network’s expertise in meeting the behavioral health needs of families will be vital to our efforts to reverse the disparities of overdose deaths in our city.”

Additional investments in the expansion of overdose prevention services, including increased capacity for treatment navigation with a focused expertise on the unique cultural needs of the Black/African American community, are part of the approach the City is taking to address this crisis.

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