

USU Extension Receives Grants to Fight Opioid Crisis in Rural Areas

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Utah State University Extension recently received two grants totaling over \$1.4 million to fund projects focused on preventing and reducing opioid use disorder in rural areas.

The two grants include the Rural Health and Safety Education Grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Rural Opioids Technical Assistance Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



(SAMHSA).

USU Extension is choosing to focus on harm reduction and stigma reduction strategies, according to Sandra Sulzer, principle investigator and director of the HEART (Health Extension: Advocacy, Research & Teaching) initiative and a USU Extension assistant professor of health and wellness. Co-Principal Investigator Suzanne Prevedel is partnering with individual members of the Ute tribe, Indian Health Services and an inter-tribal council to bring these materials to Native American communities. The NIFA project will fund an online and in-person harm reduction curriculum for substance use disorder counselors in Utah. The curriculum will initially be available in five rural counties: Emery, Carbon, Uintah, Duchesne and Daggett. After evaluating how it is received in these counties, it will be available across all of Utah. The SAMHSA grant will extend this work to community members through a combination of online volunteer training, community events and outreach, all designed to reduce stigma around harm reduction strategies.

"Utah is, in many ways, an unusually healthy state," Sulzer said. "We have some of the lowest rates of cancer in the

nation and lower-than-average tobacco and alcohol use rates. Nonetheless, opioids have been a major issue." Sulzer said that between 2000 and 2015, the state saw a 400 percent increase in deaths resulting from the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs. From 2013-2015, Utah ranked seventh in the nation for drug overdose deaths, the majority of which were opioid related.

"And some counties, such as Carbon and Emery, have rates well above that state average," she said. "This puts them among the hardest hit in the nation."

This project will ensure that evidence-based practices are being used by health care providers in rural areas so that adults struggling with addiction receive the best possible opportunity to overcome their challenges.

To learn more about USU Extension programs, visit extension.usu.edu.

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