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Pro Wellness Academy Receives Funding to Fight Opioid Addiction in Los Angeles Communities of Color

LOS ANGELES--Pro Wellness Academy, California's premier organization providing collaborative care for the state's licensed prescribers of medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorders, recently received funding from The Center at Sierra Health Foundation (SHF) to help fight opioid abuse in Los Angeles communities of color.

Pro Wellness Academy is one of 55 community-based organizations in California that was awarded SHF funding through the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) [Access Points Project](#). Nearly \$10 million in total was awarded to all organizations.

This Access Points Project funding is dedicated to prevention, education and stigma-reduction efforts for people with opioid use disorder (OUD) and substance use disorder (SUD), particularly in communities of color.

Pro Wellness Academy was awarded funding because of its collaboration with healthcare providers in communities of color that have experienced disproportionate penalization for SUD and historical trauma, particularly in health systems.

"We work daily in facilitating the expansion of medication-assisted treatment through the integration of our services with both physicians and emergency rooms," said Pro Wellness Managing Director Cynthia Kiefer.

Long considered the plight of rural, white communities, opioid addiction and opioid-related overdoses have been on the rise among African Americans in California and nationwide.¹

While two U.S. Centers for Disease and Prevention reports released last week found drug-overdose deaths had decreased nationally, California is one of five states where overdose deaths [increased](#).

"This funding allows us to expand integrated, collaborative care in Southern California's African-American communities, which lack access to medication-assisted treatment and essential behavioral wellness care, counseling and case management," Kiefer said.

In addition to providing more outpatient counseling, Kiefer said the funding allows Pro Wellness Academy to offer financial assistance to MAT patients in Los Angeles communities of color.

Between 2016 and 2017, the biggest increase in opioid-related drug overdose deaths — 56 percent — was seen among African Americans, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). In 2018, more than 10 million Americans misused opioids, according to the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#).

In California, there were 5.3 opioid-related deaths for every 100,000 people in 2017. Among African Americans in California, there are about 1.4 opioid-related deaths for every 100,000 people, a disproportionately high number in a state with an African-American population of about 6 percent.

The death rate from overdoses of the synthetic opioid fentanyl is rising [fastest](#) among African Americans.

When people receive buprenorphine for treatment of opioid dependence, they are more likely to stay in treatment and are half as likely to die from a fatal drug overdose. A regimen of therapy plus methadone, buprenorphine or naltrexone is considered the gold standard for opioid addiction treatment. Studies show methadone and buprenorphine keep people in treatment for longer and reduce relapses.

Last October, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 919 into law introduced by Assemblymember Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Laguna Beach). It mandates the California Department of Health Care Services (CDHCS) to license all addiction treatment centers in the state and requires that they adopt the American Society of Addiction Medicine's treatment criteria as an operating standard.

“Community organizations are substantial resources and essential partners in taking on this significant, statewide health concern,” said Marlies Perez, division chief at CDHCS. “This is a great opportunity to build and strengthen a knowledgeable network primed to help people and their communities prevent opioid use and opioid-related death.”

About Pro Wellness Academy

[Pro Wellness Academy](#) is one of the only organizations in California providing integrated, collaborative behavioral wellness, addiction and case management care to support healthcare facilities and medical professionals providing medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder and substance use disorder. Pro Wellness Academy has locations in most major cities throughout California, and also offers telehealth behavioral wellness and

addiction counseling care for patients in rural communities, tribal organizations and the homebound.

About MAT Access Points Project and The Center at Sierra Health Foundation

The Center at Sierra Health Foundation works to promote health and racial equity in communities throughout California with local, state and national partners. Visit shfcenter.org.

1 [J Law Med Ethics](#). 2018 Jun;46(2):404-421. doi: 10.1177/1073110518782949.