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OPIOID OVERDOSE PREVENTION PROJECT UPDATES

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The Opioid Epidemic: The Impact on Tribal Communities

The misuse of and addiction to any opioid is a widespread public health crisis. Every day, more than 130 people in the United States (U.S.) die from opioid overdoses.¹ In 2017, more than 40,000 Americans died as a result of an opioid-related overdose, and an estimated 1.7 million people in the U.S. suffered from a substance use disorder (SUD) related to prescription opioids.²⁻³

American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities have been especially hard hit by this rapidly growing epidemic, carrying an unjust burden of this problem within their families, reservations, rancherias, and homes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2017, AIAN populations had the second highest opioid overdose rate in the U.S.⁵ Although there are gaps in statewide data, existing data shows that AIAN receiving services at California Indian Health Programs (IHP) are treated for opioid use at a higher rate than that of their non-Indian counterparts.⁴ Between 2007 and 2017, AIAN patients were seen at an IHP nearly twice as many times for opioid misuse or overdose than non-Indian users.⁴ Although all age groups suffer from opioid misuse, in 2017, over 52% of opioid misuse among AIAN occurred among those between the ages of 20-40 years old.⁴

**“Families are being broken apart
because of opioid use.”**

- Tribal Community Key Informant Interview, 2019

**“Drugs and alcohol aren’t going anywhere, and we need to
accept that. What we need to do is help them; help them be
educated and understand that we are here for them.”**

- Tribal Community Key Informant Interview, 2019

¹ CDC/NCHS. National Vital Statistics System, Mortality. CDC WONDER, Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2018. <https://wonder.cdc.gov>.

² U.S Department of Health and Human Services. National Institutes of Health. (2019, April 19). HEAL Initiative Research Plan. Retrieved from <https://www.nih.gov/research-training/medical-research-initiatives/heal-initiative/heal-initiative-research-plan>

³ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ). 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; 2018

⁴ Mudgett M. Opioid Surveillance Update. California Tribal Epidemiology Center. 2018, July. Accessible at <https://crihb.org/ctec>

⁵ Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2018, December 19). Overview of the Drug Overdose Epidemic: Behind the Numbers. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/index.html>

How California Tribal Communities Are Addressing the Crisis

The California Tribal Epidemiology Center (CTEC), housed within the California Rural Indian Health Board, Inc. (CRIHB) Research and Public Health Department, has directly funded five CRIHB Member Tribes to implement an Opioid Overdose Prevention Project (OOPP). Through the OOPP, Tribes are utilizing funds to design and implement culturally appropriate opioid response plans that address their unique challenges to combating the opioid epidemic. The five Tribes include:

- Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley
- Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians
- Resighini Rancheria
- Tule River Indian Tribe of the Tule River Indian Reservation
- Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians

Funded Tribes are addressing the opioid epidemic in their communities, using Tribal Community-Driven solutions outlined in CRIHB's "Strategic Plan to Address Tribal Opioid Use." The Tribes selected at least one key focus area and created work plans that outlined project objectives and activities. The five key focus areas that have been identified as having the greatest importance in addressing the opioid epidemic in California Tribal communities include:

1. Prevention
2. Expanding Treatment and Recovery Services
3. Expanding Partnerships
4. Engaging Tribal Leadership
5. Expanding Substance Use Policies



Opioid Overdose Prevention Project Updates

Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley

Focus Area: Expanding Treatment and Recovery Services

- Objective: Expand existing Wellbriety group sessions

Project Activity Updates

- Through the OOPP, the Big Pine Wellness Center will expand existing Wellbriety group sessions by incorporating opioid-related education sessions. Topics include: Opioid 101, Administering Naloxone, and Alternative and Complementary Methods to Prescription Opioid Pain Management. They will also incorporate cultural and traditional practices to help the Wellbriety group attendees identify different paths to recovery. Activities will include beading, singing, and dancing. The sessions will take place Saturday afternoons and will be led by a Tribal community member who is on his own path to recovery and has dedicated himself to helping others in his community who struggle with substance use. To overcome COVID-19 related challenges, the Big Pine Wellness Center will purchase tablets to lend to those who have had challenges with accessing the virtual Wellbriety sessions. They are also in the process of assembling harm reduction kits, which will include naloxone, hand sanitizer, face masks, and opioid-related educational materials.



Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians

Focus Area: Expanding Treatment and Recovery Services

- Objective: Strengthen partnerships with local detox centers

Project Activity Updates

- Due to COVID-19, the local detox centers have either closed or limited the number of beds available for inpatient care and treatment, which in turn has required a shift in project activities. Although Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians will continue to work with detox centers to link individuals to substance use (SU) services, they are now offering SU emergency services to those in need. Emergency services include: developing tailored rapid response plans, assembling safety kits that include clothes and toiletries, providing patients with food, and linkage to temporary housing and transportation services.





Resighini Rancheria



Focus Area: Engaging Tribal Leadership

- Objective: Educate Tribal Council and leadership on the spectrum of opioid use disorder (OUD)

Project Activity Updates

- As the project lead for the OOPP, Resighini Rancheria's Tribal Chairwoman has focused her efforts on educating the Tribal Council and leadership on the spectrum of care of OUD, the emotional and physical effects of OUD on Tribal communities, and harm reduction best practices. Trainings have included: Opioid 101, How to Administer Naloxone, Harm Reduction 101, and Alternative and Complementary Methods to Prescription Opioid Pain Management. Virtual training sessions have occurred on a monthly basis during scheduled Tribal Council meetings.

Focus Area: Expanding Substance Use Policies

- Objective: Strengthen existing SUD Tribal policies and laws

Project Activity Updates

- Resighini Rancheria has hired a consultant to review, expand, and strengthen current SUD policies and laws. The goal is to create policies that destigmatize SUD, move away from abstinence only recovery, and decriminalize maternal and parental substance use. The updated policies and laws will be reviewed and discussed among Tribal Council members and leadership.



Tule River Indian Tribe of the Tule River Reservation



Focus Area: Prevention

- Objective: Organize a community event to increase awareness of OUD and alternative treatment options

Project Activity Updates

- Through the OOPP, Tule River Indian Tribe of the Tule River Indian Reservation set out to conduct a culturally appropriate awareness event that was tailored to the specific needs of their community. In partnership with CRIHB, Tule River Indian Tribe of the Tule River Reservation conducted a virtual community harm reduction event that spanned across four weeks. Topics discussed included: describing What Opioids Are and How They Affect the Body and Mind, Best Harm Reduction Practices, and Alternative and Complementary Methods to Prescription Opioid Management. To provide alternative methods regarding recovery, a yoga trainer, Reiki practitioner, and acupuncturist were asked to speak and offer tips and guidance to mindful and spiritual healing. As an incentive for participation, harm reduction kits were assembled and disseminated to community members. The kits included face masks, hand sanitizer, naloxone, and information on how to respond during an opioid overdose.



Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians



Focus Area: Engaging Tribal Leadership

- Objective: Educate Tribal Council and leadership on the spectrum of OUD

Project Activity Updates

- Through the OOPP, Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians has educated their Tribal Council and leadership on the spectrum of treatment and care of OUD, effects of opioid misuse on Tribal communities, and culturally appropriate harm reduction practices. Through education, the Tribal Council will be equipped to make informed decisions on Tribal policies. The Tribal Council received virtual trainings during their monthly council meeting to include: Opioid 101, Administering Naloxone, Harm Reduction Methods, Alternative and Complimentary Methods to Prescription Opioid Pain Management, and quantitative and qualitative opioid data updates. The Tribal Council has responded positively and expressed that the Harm Reduction training broadened their perspective on stigma and its negative impacts on a Tribal communities. After completing the naloxone training, the Tribal Council has decided to train their Tribal Security and Public Works crew on how to administer naloxone. In total, twelve Tribal Security staff and four Public Works crew members will be certified on how to properly administer naloxone.

Focus Area: Prevention

- Objective: Organize a community event to increase awareness of opioid use disorder and treatment options

Project Activity Updates

- In the upcoming month, Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians will conduct a virtual community event in order to provide opioid-related education that will destigmatize opioid use disorder and educate the community on treatment options, including traditional and cultural healing practices. To ensure that all community members have access to the virtual event, Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians will purchase tablets to lend to community members. As an incentive for participation, they will assemble harm reduction kits, which will include: hand sanitizer, face masks, opioid-related education, naloxone, and information on herbal remedies for pain management. The virtual series will start off with a training on How to Administer Naloxone. A flyer has been created and distributed to community members.



Impact of Opioid Overdose Prevention Projects

CRIHB's Tribal Opioid Strategic Plan identified five focus areas that would help Tribes address opioid use, increase prevention efforts, expand treatment and recovery services, strengthen partnerships, engage Tribal leaderships, and expand substance use policies. Funded Tribes utilized these approaches and have reported significant progress. Their achievements build on the culture, traditions, and practices of Tribal communities and coalitions throughout California. Continued efforts driven by the community and supported by CRIHB will ensure the health, well-being, and spirituality of California Tribal communities for current and future generations.

What's Next?

With CDC funds, CRIHB will fund four additional CRIHB Member Tribes as they address opioid overdose in California Tribal communities. CRIHB will use examples and success stories from other Tribes to demonstrate the kinds of activities that can be implemented to combat the opioid epidemic.



For more information about the OOPP, contact Alejandra Cabrera, CRIHB Project Coordinator, at (916) 929-9761 or acabrera@crihb.org.