



FNA to expand services to address opioid epidemic with \$1.5 million grant

Contact: Steve Ginnis, Fairbanks Native Association executive director, 907-452-1648

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Fairbanks, Alaska-Fairbanks Native Association will expand services to address the opioid epidemic in the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has awarded FNA a three-year \$1.5 million grant for opioid use disorders among Alaska Natives/American Indians.

“This is an important step for FNA,” said Steve Ginnis, FNA executive director. “FNA has years of expertise in opioid use treatment and education. This grant will allow us to offer better options, from detoxification to healthy living for Fairbanks tribal members.”

Fairbanks has some of the highest rates of opioid use and deaths in the state, among all races.

The grant will provide six new positions and expand opioid services from detoxification to recovery programs. The grant has three goals.

- Develop community education and awareness to address the opioid epidemic
- Expand access to culturally appropriate medically assisted treatment services
- Build support systems for strengthening families using culturally appropriate methods

Public education about opioid use and the resulting epidemic is considered “central work of the opioid response” according to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. The FNA grant will allow for the development of a marketing campaign focused on community understanding and behavioral health education in regards to opioids, said Perry Ahsogeak, director of FNA Behavioral Health Services.

Additionally, opioid use is not something that can easily be overcome by will and determination, as opioids hijack the brain. Using medication to overcome the physical and emotional distress of coming off of opioids is considered best practices, he said. The new FNA grant will increase MAT services.

Finally, people who enter opioid treatment often need to address social and relationship problems that have arisen due to their opioid use disorder. Ahsogeak said that FNA BHS will use culturally appropriate parenting curriculum, peer support, elder involvement and transition planning to help families and individuals in recovery.

“FNA has addressed opioid abuse early on in this current epidemic,” Ahsogeak said. “Because of that foundation, we are ideally situated to provide a comprehensive continuum of care for our consumers.”

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