

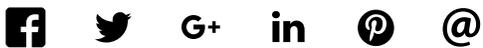
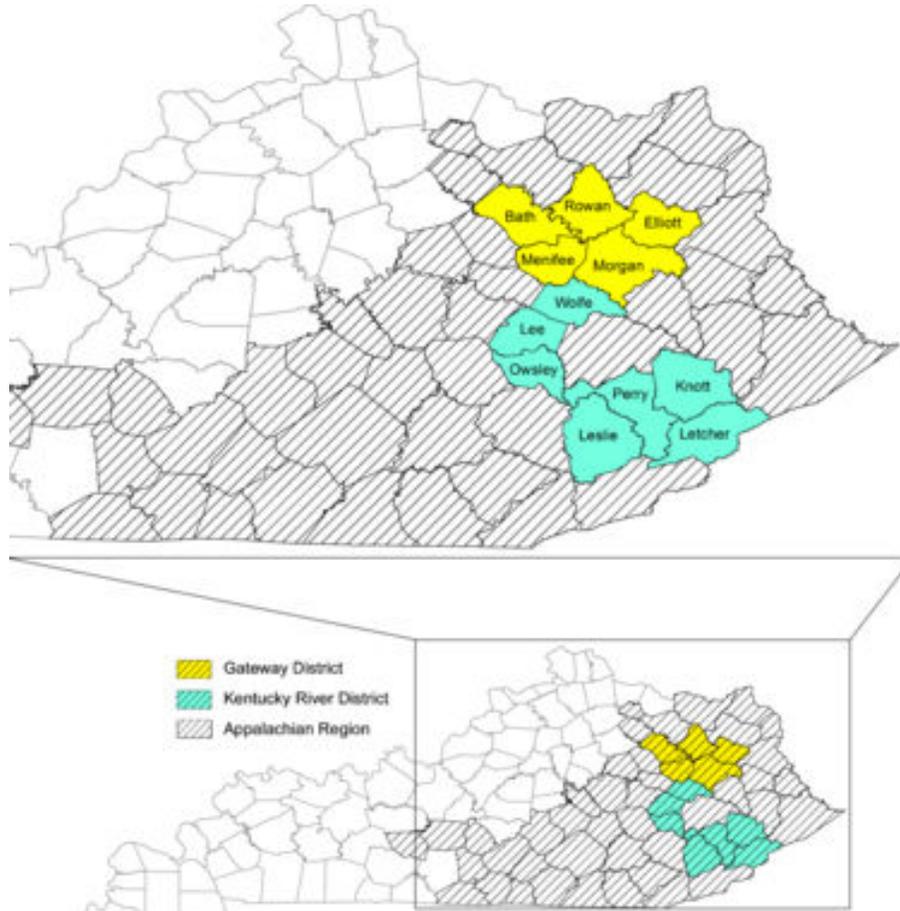
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TOPICAL

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\$1.16 million grant awarded to combat opioid epidemic

By Brad Stacy, The Morehead News Aug 31, 2017



MOREHEAD - A cooperative agreement has been made between multiple parties and regional communities to conduct research addressing the opioid epidemic in eastern Kentucky counties, including Rowan.

This study will help identify and build evidence-based, community-rooted public health responses to epidemics of opioid injecting, overdoses, hepatitis C, and to imminent HIV outbreaks in rural areas.

The \$1.16 million partnership is with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Appalachian Regional Commission. Dr. April Young, researcher with the University of Kentucky College of Public Health and Center on Drug and Alcohol Research, along with a co-principal investigator at Emory University.

Young also helped drive the initiative to start Rowan County's Harm Reduction Program.

She visited the area often speaking to many government and community groups, detailing ways to combat the spread of serious disease.

The project has been named the Kentucky Communities and Researchers Engaging to Halt the Opioid Epidemic (CARE2HOPE).

"Rural Kentucky is experiencing significant harms from opioid misuse, including drug dependence, overdoses, and hepatitis C," CARE2HOPE says. "The purpose of this study is to improve the health of rural Kentuckians by developing comprehensive approaches to prevent and treat consequences of opioid injection."

The project focuses on the 12 counties that make up the Gateway Health Department District and the Kentucky River Health Department District. Those include Rowan, Bath, Elliott, Knox, Lee, Leslie, Letcher, Menifee, Morgan, Owsley, Perry, and Wolfe counties.

According to the University of Kentucky, the study includes both epidemiological and qualitative research which will be conducted by Young, her colleagues in the UK Center on Drug and Alcohol Research, Emory University and other partnering institutions.

UKNOW, UK's news website, says the first two years of the five-year project will focus on studying opioid use to create a better understanding and its context in the designated area.

The team will conduct interviews and surveys in the community and collect information on resources and factors that impact access to treatment for opioid use disorder as well as risks for related harms such as overdose, hepatitis C (HCV) and HIV.

They will also work with the communities to identify evidence-based community response projects that meet their needs.

The final three years of the study, estimated to cost about \$3.25 million, are contingent on meeting milestones in the first two years.

During this intervention phase, the team will work with the communities to implement and evaluate the evidence-based community response projects.

The goal is for communities to gain the tools to continue programs implemented after the study has been completed.

“It benefits these communities to have experts from across the county working to address the opioid epidemic,” Young told UKNOW.

Hannah Cooper, co-principal investigator of the project and associate professor in the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University, worked with Young in Morehead on another project and was shocked by what she saw in her first opportunity to visit the region.

“On my first trip to the Gateway district, I was struck by both the devastating consequences of the local opioid epidemic, and by the local community's fierce commitment to stopping it,” Cooper told the news website.

“Whenever two institutions collaborate, you end up with a proposal that is stronger than it would have been with just a single institution. In this case, the University of Kentucky is renowned for its innovative and rigorous research on rural opioid epidemics, networks and hepatitis C. By interweaving this expertise with Emory's strengths in community-based participatory action research and community trials, we created a remarkably strong proposal.”

Other UK team members working on the process are with the UK Center on Drug and Alcohol Research and have more than 40 years of combined experience in research on rural drug use.

Collaboration with other institutions will include the Harm Reduction Coalition, Kentucky Department for Public Health and other state departments and agencies, Boston University, RTI, the Gateway and Kentucky River District Health Departments, AIDS Volunteers, Inc. (AVOL) and other community leaders and organizations.

Congressman Hal Rogers drafted a letter of support for the grant application.