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AS OVERDOSE DEATHS DECLINE NATIONALLY, WIDE DISPARITIES PERSIST FOR BLACK ADULTS
A NEW CAMPAIGN ACROSS 7 CITIES AIMS TO ENERGIZE BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS TO
REDUCE OVERDOSE DEATHS

NEW YORK, NY – In the wake of a decade-long surge in drug overdose deaths among Black Americans nationwide, a coalition of Black community leaders, government officials, and health experts across seven cities today launched a campaign to promote the use of overdose-reversing naloxone in Black communities. Engaging in the campaign are Louisville, KY; Durham, NC; Milwaukee, WI; Newark, NJ; Albuquerque, NM; Philadelphia, PA; and Detroit, MI

A ZOOM press conference and rally was held today with media and community, civic, and government leaders from the target cities. A video of the press conference will be available after the event [HERE](#).

The campaign also released [a report](#) consolidating recent evidence that illustrates the need for urgent action to save lives, finding:

- Overdose is the [leading cause of preventable death](#) for Black adults in the United States, surpassing gun violence and car crashes. In many cities, older Black men are [four times more likely](#) to die of overdose than other men in their age group.

- Overdose rates in Black communities [have been rising for the past ten years](#), but have skyrocketed since 2020, when overdose rates in the Black population overtook rates in the white population.
- In [the vast majority of states where recent data is available by race](#), Black communities suffer higher fatal overdose rates than white populations.
- Nationwide, there has been [a recent 24% decline](#) in overdose deaths, but data suggests the number of deaths in Black communities remains disproportionately high and calls for equitable investment and focus on health interventions to address this problem.
- Increasing community-based naloxone access is an impactful way to reduce overdose deaths: Most overdoses occur in the home; [up to 40% of overdoses are witnessed by someone who could have intervened](#) if the naloxone were on hand.

Supported by public health organization Vital Strategies, with funding from [the Elton John AIDS Foundation](#), the “You Have the Power to Save Lives” campaign includes more than a dozen community groups, health organizations, and local government agencies. Their efforts focus on establishing new naloxone distribution points in Black communities—including firehouses, neighborhood gathering spaces, and local health providers—to reduce the stigma around carrying naloxone and empower individuals to save lives in the event of an overdose.

Additionally, the campaign will promote community champions who speak out through ads on radio and digital media across the seven cities. The personal appeals of people directly affected by overdose are a powerful plea to keep naloxone readily available to save friends and loved ones who may overdose on opioids, such as heroin and fentanyl, or from prescription medications like oxycodone or codeine. At the heart of the campaign is a new website – [YouCanSaveLives.org](#) – where people can find out where to obtain naloxone nearby, hear powerful, real-world testimonials, and take action to spread the word about the importance of naloxone.

“We are cautiously optimistic about declining overdose death rates nationally, but after years of skyrocketing rates, the wide disparities experienced by Black communities are raising the alarm,” emphasized Daliah Heller, Vice President for Overdose Prevention Initiatives at Vital Strategies. “Rates are higher among Black adults than their white counterparts; we urgently need equitable and focused strategies. The campaign is making lifesaving naloxone more widely available in Black communities in seven states and mobilizing Black people to carry it to protect friends, family, and community.”

Tracie M. Gardner, Executive Director of the National Black Harm Reduction Network, said that the “You Have the Power to Save Lives” campaign is urgently needed to engage these community and grassroots leaders as advocates for naloxone. “To bring persistently high

overdose rates in Black populations down, we can draw upon the strengths, values, and beliefs within our communities,” maintained Gardner, whose organization is a key partner in the campaign. “One of the legacies of the war on drugs is stigma and mistrust. We’re proud that the campaign is built in partnership with Black community champions and will reach into communities through talk shows, community newspapers, church bulletins, and neighborhood hubs to promote lifesaving naloxone.”

In a video message at today's press conference, Marc Morial, President of the National Urban League, applauded the “You Have the Power to Save Lives” campaign. “The needless death of so many, both young and old, from drug overdoses is an issue that demands our immediate attention. “Black and Brown communities must be made aware that this life-saving medicine is available for free in many communities. We do have the power to stop preventable overdose deaths. Each of us listening today can play a crucial role in this fight by passing this knowledge on.”

Anne Aslett, Chief Executive Officer at the Elton John AIDS Foundation, said: "Recognizing the inequities Black communities face in accessing naloxone, the Elton John AIDS Foundation is proud to support the 'You Have the Power to Save Lives' campaign. This initiative unites trusted community leaders to expand naloxone access where it's needed most. By investing in evidence and compassion-driven solutions and ensuring the power to act remains in the hands of the community, we're seeking to turn the tide on the current overdose crisis."

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About the Elton John AIDS Foundation:

The Elton John AIDS Foundation was established in 1992 and is one of the leading independent AIDS organizations in the world. The Foundation’s mission is simple: an end to the AIDS epidemic. The Elton John AIDS Foundation is committed to overcome the stigma, discrimination and neglect that keeps us from ending AIDS. With the mobilization of our network of generous supporters and partners, we fund local experts across four continents to challenge discrimination, prevent infections and provide treatment as well as influencing governments to end AIDS. www.eltonjohnaidsfoundation.org, @ejaf on Instagram.

About Vital Strategies:

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. Our overdose prevention program works to strengthen and scale evidence-based, data-driven policies and interventions to create equitable and sustainable reductions in overdose deaths in several U.S. states and local jurisdictions.

About the National Black Harm Reduction Network:

The National Black Harm Reduction Network is dedicated to advancing harm reduction principles that optimize health and wellness for Black people who are disproportionately harmed by public health initiatives, the criminal legal system, and drug policies.