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Contact:

Tony Newman, Vital Strategies: tnewman@vitalstrategies.org, 646-335-5384

Gloria Malone, Vital Strategies: gmalone@vitalstrategies.org

Press Conference Video: “You Have the Power to Save Lives” Campaign is Effective in Raising Awareness and Promoting Access to Naloxone in Black Communities

Oct. 1: Featured organizers of You Have the Power to Save Lives shared data and stories about the impact of the campaign, and opportunities for cities and communities to get involved.

NEW YORK, NY — Across the United States, overdose deaths decreased in 2024 by nearly 27% from the previous year—a massively positive development. But the United States still loses more than 80,000 people every year, and Black and Indigenous communities continue to be disproportionately affected by high rates of overdose death.

To address the overdose crisis in Black communities, public health organization Vital Strategies launched a major communications campaign, “[You Have the Power to Save Lives](#),” in March 2025. The campaign was designed to raise awareness and promote the availability of naloxone in Black communities in seven cities—Newark, NJ; Durham, NC; Philadelphia, PA; Detroit, MI; Louisville, KY; Milwaukee, WI; and Albuquerque, NM—uniting community leaders, public officials, and health experts to spread the word. Vital Strategies partnered with community leaders, city agencies, and other critical partners, including the [National Black Harm Reduction Network](#) and the [Elton John AIDS Foundation](#) to develop and launch the campaign.

A briefing held on Oct. 1 featured organizers of *You Have the Power to Save Lives* sharing data and stories about the impact of the campaign, and opportunities for cities and communities to get

involved. The press conference was moderated by Daliah Heller, Vice President of Overdose Prevention Initiatives at Vital Strategies.

View the recorded press conference [here](#).

“We knew from the start in building this campaign that we needed to be accountable to specific communities and long-built local partnerships that Vital Strategies has formed in these seven cities,” said Sharda Sekaran, consulting lead for the campaign. “We needed a campaign that was relatable and authentic enough to feel credible and persuasive to these local partners, but yet it needed to be general enough to adapt to the different cities and scaled up for the future for all the cities who we hope will be joining the campaign.”

Across participating cities, the campaign promotes low-barrier, confidential access to naloxone in everyday neighborhood places and helps to reduce the stigma that has often discouraged open conversation about overdose in Black communities. Backed by a robust advertising strategy and featuring stories from parents, pastors, and other community leaders, *You Have the Power to Save Lives* has already reached hundreds of thousands of Black Americans where they live, work, worship, and gather.

“According to our surveys, 37%, or nearly 1.9 million people, recalled the campaign. There will be many more people who were exposed to the campaign, but it's 1.9 million who saw it, remembered it, and were able to say something about it. That is an important measure of a campaign's reach,” Nandita Murukutla, Vice President of Communications Research at Vital Strategies. “For a public health campaign to achieve this in just three months, and in such a competitive media landscape, really reflects the strength of the strategy that included a mix of digital, radio, outdoor, and community partnerships.”

Research also revealed the campaign media generated over 32 million total impressions, nearly 1.5 million video views, and [hundreds of media hits](#) nationwide. People who saw the campaign were at least five times more likely to carry naloxone, three times more likely to know where to get it, and two times more likely to feel confident using it to reverse an overdose. Close to half reported talking about the messages in the campaign with friends, family, or other people around them.

“The very communities that are highly impacted simply did not [historically] have access to the array of resources that we know are scientifically proven to reduce overdose,” said Tracie Gardner, Executive Director for the National Black Harm Reduction Network. “The campaign is about access, it's about understanding culture and history, and it's about engaging community champions in bringing this message.”

Powerful stories from community champions sit at the heart of *You Have the Power to Save Lives*. “My son died of a drug overdose. Like many other mothers that have lost loved ones, I took my pain, and I turned it into a purpose. My purpose was to address overdose, bring awareness to my community that they have the power to save lives by using naloxone,” said Anita Garrett, a community leader in Milwaukee who was featured in the campaign.

“We've created specialized naloxone distribution programs or guides for adults, students, college students, community organizations, court judges, faith communities, healthcare workers, parents and PTA members, pregnant women, the recovering community, school staff, seniors, and youth to assist our health ambassadors in their distribution efforts. Why? Because one conversation isn't enough,” said Dr. Wanda Boone, CEO Together for Resilient Youth in Durham, North Carolina. “In terms of engagement, we're not only talking about awareness at the individual level, but we're also talking about trauma and the census tracts where overdoses happen. We've distributed naloxone in public housing, clinics, over 200 businesses including convenience stores, barbershops, and grocery stores.”

The impactful effort is already generating interest from other cities where Black overdose deaths are disproportionately high, with Las Vegas, NV and Charlotte, NC recently joining the campaign.

“In the City of Philadelphia, starting on August 28th, 2025, we were able to put 48,312 doses of naloxone in 61 fire stations. We chose fire stations very strategically, because we know that firemen and women, EMTs, are seen, across different communities as very safe,” said Keli McLoyd, Director Overdose Response Unit for the City of Philadelphia. “We are so excited about this initiative and would love to help any other jurisdiction do this. As always, the goal is going to be to get as much naloxone out to everybody in the community.”

Organizers welcome and encourage other jurisdictions to get involved, to continue expanding the reach and visibility of naloxone access in Black communities across the country.

“Our campaign is helping get naloxone in the hands of those who need it, but it's local leaders who are now carrying this effort forward,” said Daliah Heller, Vice President for Overdose Prevention Initiatives at Vital Strategies. “Cities like Detroit and Philadelphia are expanding naloxone distribution through new community-based boxes, and Albuquerque has taken the lead by launching their own locally designed billboards featuring Black residents. That's exactly what we hoped to inspire. Vital Strategies is here to support and partner with any city ready to join this life-saving effort—we offer creative materials, messaging guidance, and a proven framework to help communities make this campaign their own.”

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 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 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.