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Groundbreaking Partnership Aims to Combat Youth Substance Abuse and Overdose Deaths in California

Sacramento, CA– Through a dynamic partnership funded by the California Department of Health Care Access and Information, the California Alliance of Child and Family Services' Catalyst Center, the California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives, Inc. (CAADPE), and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing (National Council), we aim to address the urgent need for non-medical personnel to recognize and respond to signs of substance misuse among youth, amidst a backdrop of soaring overdose deaths¹ in the state.

In response to alarming data highlighting a 121%² spike in opioid-related deaths in California between 2019 and 2021, largely attributed to the potent synthetic opioid fentanyl³, this partnership seeks to empower those who work closely with children and youth through a widely accessible training program. The initiative includes the development of a core training program and a train-the-trainer model. The training will use a preventative approach to Substance Use Disorders (SUD), with special attention to youth in foster care and the juvenile justice systems. It will be designed for youth-serving adults who do not have medical or behavioral health backgrounds.

"This collaboration represents a significant stride towards bridging the gap in our community's ability to effectively identify and support young individuals grappling with substance use challenges," said Robb Layne, Executive Director of CAADPE. "Through this initiative, we aim to cultivate a network of informed, vigilant adults equipped to guide our youth towards the help they desperately need."

1 <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/08/30/fentanyl-killing-teens-government-00112729>

2 <https://skylab.cdph.ca.gov/ODdash/?tab=Home>

3 https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7150a2.htm?s_cid=mm7150a2_w

"Our partnership in this grant underscores our commitment to not only safeguarding but also nurturing the well-being of children and families across California," said Christine Stoner-Mertz, CEO of the CA Alliance and the Catalyst Center. "By focusing on education and prevention, we can transform the lives of countless young individuals and support them to thrive."

"The National Council for Mental Wellbeing is proud to be part of this vital initiative, which aligns perfectly with our mission to promote mental health and resilience," said Charles Ingoglia, President and CEO of the National Council. "By educating non-medical personnel on the frontlines, we are expanding the safety net for our youth, ensuring early intervention and referral to lifesaving services."

The core training program will be carefully designed for adults who regularly interact with youth, equipping them with the knowledge to recognize the early signs of substance use and the competencies to refer affected individuals to professional help. The train-the-trainer component is aimed at fostering a sustainable pool of trainers capable of circulating this crucial knowledge within their communities.

As part of the training development process, the initiative will conduct focus groups to ensure the program is community-driven and resonates with the needs and values of the populations it aims to serve. The ultimate goal is to reduce the incidence of substance misuse and related deaths among youth, facilitating a pathway to recovery and support through professional behavioral health services. The training is set to launch statewide in May of 2025 after a comprehensive and inclusive design process.

This collaboration marks a critical step forward in the collective effort to combat the escalating crisis of substance misuse and overdose among California's youth. By empowering community members with the tools and knowledge to act, the CA Alliance, CAADPE, and the National Council are dedicated to creating a safer, healthier future for all.

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