



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Open Doors Training Program Officially Launches to Empower California's Youth-Serving Adults**

*Sacramento, Calif.*— In a bold step toward combating the escalating crisis of youth substance use and overdose in California, the California Alliance of Child and Family Services' Catalyst Center and the California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives, Inc. (CAADPE) proudly announce the official launch of the Open Doors Training Program.

Substance use among youth has escalated over the years, and our approach to address the crisis must take on urgency. The Open Doors innovative training program equips adults who engage with or support youth—including educators, community leaders, and youth-serving professionals—with the tools and knowledge to recognize early signs of substance use, respond with compassion, and connect young people to vital support services. This program, funded by the State of California's Department of Health Care Access and Information, and shaped with the input of youth voices and grounded in harm reduction and prevention strategies, takes a community-driven approach to addressing substance use challenges among California's youth.

*"The launch of Open Doors represents a transformative milestone in how we address youth substance use," said Robb Layne, Executive Director of CAADPE. "By empowering the trusted adults in young people's lives, we are taking a meaningful step toward reducing stigma, increasing early intervention, and saving lives."*

### **A Timely Initiative to Address a Growing Crisis**

California has witnessed a dramatic 121%<sup>1</sup> increase in opioid-related deaths from 2019 and 2021, driven largely by the rise of synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Young people are not immune to this crisis. This alarming trend highlights why youth need trusted adults who can have open, honest conversations with them about these risks.

Adding urgency to the initiative, a recent study published in *Pediatrics* highlights that adolescent overdose deaths nearly doubled between 2019 and 2021, with synthetic opioids involved in 84% of cases and a troubling rise in stimulant involvement as well. Alarming, researchers found that the majority of youth overdoses occurred in homes or residences, underscoring the critical need for equipping adults with intervention skills (*Pediatrics*, 2024).

Recent legislative victories, including Assembly Bill 2711 and Senate Bill 997, further underscore the urgent need for education and support for our youth. Open Doors directly supports these reforms by equipping adults—whether they are teachers, coaches, youth program leaders, or other community members—to create safe, healing environments for youth.

*"The passage of these bills signals a profound shift in how schools and communities can respond to substance use among young people," said Christine Stoner-Mertz, CEO of the CA Alliance and Catalyst Center. "Open Doors will be a vital resource in helping educators, caregivers, and adults working in youth-serving systems build a culture of care and prevention."*

## Comprehensive Training for Meaningful Connection

The Open Doors Training Program includes:

- **Core Training Modules:** A dynamic, interactive training program that educates youth-serving adults on identifying early warning signs of substance use, understanding the social and environmental factors influencing youth behavior, and practicing harm-reduction strategies to foster trust and open communication with young people.
- **A Comprehensive Online Hub:** [OpenDoorsTraining.org](https://opendoorstraining.org) serves as the central platform for on-demand resources, training updates, culturally responsive materials, and a streamlined interest form for individuals and organizations eager to participate.
- **Coming Soon – Train-the-Trainer Model:** In the near future, Open Doors will introduce a Train-the-Trainer model, equipping local champions with the knowledge and skills to facilitate training sessions within their own communities, ensuring ongoing education and a growing network of informed advocates.

*"Open Doors is more than a training program—it's a movement to reimagine how we approach youth substance use," said Christine Stoner-Mertz, CEO of the CA Alliance and Catalyst Center, and Robb Layne, Executive Director of CAADPE. "By prioritizing early intervention and community involvement, the Catalyst Center and CAADPE are creating a brighter, healthier future for California's youth."*

## Join our Community

The Open Doors Training Program is now live. Visit [opendoorstraining.org](https://opendoorstraining.org) to access resources, sign up for updates, and become part of the solution to one of the most pressing public health crises facing California today.

Together, we can open doors to prevention, recovery, resilience, and hope for the next generation.

Connect with us and explore all our links in one place! Visit our Link Tree [HERE](#).

*Citation: Anderson, E. A., & Crane, S. M. (2024). Trends in Adolescent Overdose Deaths: 2019-2021. *Pediatrics*, 154(Supplement 3), e2024067043N. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2024067043N>*