

De Blasio commits \$8M to address opioid epidemic in the Bronx

Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday the [city will allocate \\$8 million](#) in response to the still-rising death rate from opioid overdoses in the Bronx. The funding will support an advertising campaign on the dangers of the powerful opioid fentanyl, distribution of the overdose-reversal drug naloxone and community groups that connect people to treatment.

The rate of overdose deaths in the Bronx increased 9% last year, compared with a 2% increase citywide. Overdose rates are double the city average in such areas such as Hunts Point, Mott Haven and Highbridge-Morrisania. The funding is part of the \$60 million in funding the city set aside in March for HealingNYC, which aims to address substance abuse.

"We're increasing resources in the Bronx to make sure one of the hardest-hit boroughs has the resources it needs to turn the tide on this devastating epidemic," Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement.

The city said it will spend \$1 million on an ad campaign to make people aware that fentanyl, a drug that can be up to 50 times more potent than heroin, can be present in cocaine, crack cocaine and heroin. It plans to post the ads in bus shelters and subway stations, on billboards and in bodegas, barbershops and laundromats, the mayor's office said. It also plans to promote ads with information about methadone and buprenorphine treatment.

The plan also involves increasing the capacity of existing programs that address addiction in the Bronx. The Health Department is looking to add two health engagement and assessment teams, which are made up of a social worker and a peer advocate, to accompany first responders on overdose calls. Two Bronx clinics—Family Health Center and Williamsbridge Family Practice Center—are set to add buprenorphine nurse care managers to integrate addiction treatment with primary care.

Those programs are a start, but hospitals can go further in treating people who have survived an opioid overdose, said Dr. Chinazo Cunningham, a professor and associate chief of general internal medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Montefiore Health System, who has researched opioid use.

"Why not just start treatment in the emergency room?" Cunningham said. "Actually give someone buprenorphine then and there in that setting and then link them to care."

She said Montefiore is considering delivering such treatment in the emergency room.

Montefiore, along with St. Barnabas Hospital, is one of the participants in the city's Relay program. Relay matches emergency department patients who have suffered an overdose with peer advocates who can encourage them to seek treatment. The mayor said Tuesday that the city will expand the Relay program to BronxCare Health System, which was formerly known as Bronx-Lebanon.

More hospitals could use peer advocates, said Mary Callahan, director of outpatient services for Odyssey House, a national nonprofit that runs a substance-abuse program in the South Bronx.

"Historically, the gaps in treatment have existed in connecting people to services," Callahan said. "The peers can change that because they share their own experience, and it can be motivating."

The next step, she said, would be using peer advocates to encourage people to seek outpatient treatment after undergoing inpatient detox. More funding should be made available to pay people while they gain the experience needed to become a certified recovery peer advocate, she added.