



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

September 28, 2021

Maryland, like other states, has observed an increase in overdose deaths among the Black community. Between 2017-2019, overdose deaths decreased by 11% for white Marylanders, but increased by almost 40% for Black Marylanders. To address this growing disparity, the Racial Disparities in Overdose Task Force, co-chaired by Dr. Aliya Jones, Deputy Secretary for Behavioral Health and Dr. Noel Brathwaite, Director of the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, was formed in February 2021 under the Inter-agency Opioid Coordinating Council, chaired by Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford.

The purpose of the Task Force is to explore the contributing factors leading to the accelerating rate of overdose deaths in the Black community. To support this work, the Task Force has identified four goals:

1. Identify focused, data-informed interventions (programs/policies) as well as seek out innovative pilot/emerging projects that will reduce the disparity in overdose fatalities in the Black community which has been showing escalating rates of death despite statewide interventions.
2. To recommend programs/policies that will decrease factors contributing to the disparity in overdose deaths that reflect and include community voice/insights and address the structural determinants of drug use.
3. To determine how to increase acceptance of evidence-based practices for opioid use disorders in affected communities using a tailored approach
4. Considering historical inequities, ensure equitable allocation of resources to combat the opioid epidemic

### Racial Disparities in Overdose Task Force Workgroups

Workgroups are currently being formed in alignment with the Task Force's stated goals. To further investigate contributing factors and to deliberate policy and program solutions to reduce overdose mortality within the Black Community, workgroups will meet between September 2021 and March 2022. Workgroups are open to the public and we encourage your participation.

If you are interested in joining a workgroup, **please contact Marianne Gibson:**

[Marianne.Gibson@maryland.gov](mailto:Marianne.Gibson@maryland.gov), by Friday, **October 1, 2021**. We anticipate broad interest in the workgroups, so when responding, please rank order your preference for participating in each workgroup and indicate the skills and expertise you will bring to the group.

Thank you in advance for your interest in assisting with this important work.

Aliya Jones, M.D.  
Deputy Secretary Behavioral Health

Noel Brathwaite, PhD, MSPH  
Director, Office of Minority Health & Health Disparities