



# CONTENTS

## FUNDING

- 03. Justice Department Launches 2025 Access to Justice Prize to Address the Rural Justice Gap

## PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

- 04. Choctaw Nation Found a Better Way to Deliver Harm Reduction
- 04. Substance Use Prevention Model Working in This Kentucky County

## RESEARCH & REPORTS

- 05. Understanding MAT Access in the Context of Unused MAT Capacity in the United States: When Increasing Rural MAT Capacity is not Enough
- 05. Rural Houselessness Among People Who Use Drugs in the United States: Results From the National Rural Opioid Initiative
- 06. Anger and Associated Risk and Protective Factors Among Rural American Adolescents: Implications for Violence Prevention
- 06. Description of Implementing a Mail-Based Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution Program in Community Supervision Settings During COVID-19
- 06. Rural Justice Initiative Committee Releases Report and Recommendations
- 06. An Enticing Offer: How Some Rural Communities are Winning the Competition for New Clinicians



## ARTICLE

- 07. Wisconsin's Rural Homelessness Crisis and the Fight to Do 'More With Less'

## WEBINAR

- 07. Identifying and Responding to Stalking in Rural Communities

# FUNDING

## JUSTICE DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES 2025 ACCESS TO JUSTICE PRIZE TO ADDRESS THE RURAL JUSTICE GAP

The Access to Justice Prize is a competition to advance innovative solutions to address the widespread justice gap and increase access to justice for all. The Access to Justice Prize invites community-based and non-profit organizations; academic institutions; and local, state, Tribal and territorial governments—including courts, public defender offices, and prosecutorial agencies—to submit proposals for an innovative idea to expand access to justice, including, for example, solutions to:

- Increase access to legal representation, assistance or information
- Simplify legal processes, systems, forms or language
- Leverage technology to enhance legal system efficiency
- Expand access for underserved rural populations, including Tribal communities and individuals with disabilities
- Build innovative partnerships to address local justice needs

Visit [Challenge.gov](https://www.challenge.gov) to view the [Access to Justice Prize website](#) and review eligibility requirements, submission guidelines, and resources.

The deadline to apply is March 31, 2025.

*“Through our engagement with courts, justice practitioners, legal aid providers, academic institutions and other organizations across the country, we’ve heard loud and clear that solutions to close the rural justice gap must begin with rural communities themselves. Through the Access to Justice Prize competition, we further this approach, empowering those who best know the barriers their communities face to drive the effective solutions that will ensure access to justice for all, regardless of geography.”*

*- Rachel Rossi  
Former Director of the  
Office for Access to Justice*



# PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

## CHOCTAW NATION FOUND A BETTER WAY TO DELIVER HARM REDUCTION

While national overdose rates declined from 2022 to 2023, Native communities continue to see increases. The challenges are particularly acute for Tribal Nations, which are typically located in rural areas where health access is limited by distance, poverty, and lack of infrastructure. This article describes a multifaceted opioid intervention program that provides harm-reduction supplies in the community based on data from the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program (ODMAP) and community feedback, a medication-assisted treatment (MAT) clinic, and a recovery-based curriculum and treatment program that reconnects individuals in recovery with traditional healing practices.



Image: Deidre Elrod

## SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION MODEL WORKING IN THIS KENTUCKY COUNTY



In Franklin County, Kentucky, sports, arts and music are the focus of a new substance-use prevention program. The county has adapted an overseas model, called Just Say Yes, that is showing results. Data from the Franklin County Youth Survey show that kids who participate in afterschool activities are less likely to drink and use drugs. Since implementing the [Just Say Yes](#) program, the percentage of students participating in weekly activities has grown. The program is administered by the Franklin County Health Department and is expanding to serve high-risk students K-12 using state Opioid Settlement funds.

## RURAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE

Rural communities face unique challenges that impact their ability to deliver fair and equitable justice. Despite these challenges, rural communities rely on their many strengths to address the needs of their residents.

The National Center for State Courts, in partnership with Rulo Strategies, launched the [Rural Justice Collaborative \(RJC\)](#) to showcase the strengths of rural communities and highlight the cross-sector collaboration that is a hallmark of rural justice systems.

The work under the RJC is supported by a cross-sector advisory council composed of rural judges along with additional stakeholders in the justice, child welfare, and behavioral health systems. The advisory council guides and identifies innovative programs and practices.

# RESEARCH & REPORTS

## **UNDERSTANDING MAT ACCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF UNUSED MAT CAPACITY IN THE UNITED STATES: WHEN INCREASING RURAL MAT CAPACITY IS NOT ENOUGH**

Section 1262 Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 eliminates the federal DATA waiver registration requirement to prescribe buprenorphine. As the impact of the waiver elimination unfolds, understanding the factors that historically influenced provider capacity and prescribing, patient access, and whether community need for medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is met can inform how to capitalize on DATA waiver eliminations particularly in rural communities. This paper explores the relationship between MAT capacity and access (i.e., buprenorphine) in rural communities, examines whether rural consortia met the national minimum rate of MAT provision, and identifies barriers that impact the results. Findings show that while both capacity and access did increase, an additional 11,454 individuals could have potentially received buprenorphine if all waived providers prescribed to a conservative patient limit of thirty patients.

## **RURAL HOUSELESSNESS AMONG PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN THE UNITED STATES: RESULTS FROM THE NATIONAL RURAL OPIOID INITIATIVE**

Over the last two decades, houselessness and drug-related epidemics both have expanded from urban to rural regions across the United States. However, our understanding of the relationship between rural houselessness, drug use, and drug-related harm has not kept pace. The current study addresses this gap by describing houselessness among a large cohort of people who use drugs (PWUD) from rural communities across 10 states.

CONTENTS

FUNDING

PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

RESEARCH & REPORTS

ARTICLE

WEBINAR

## **ANGER AND ASSOCIATED RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS AMONG RURAL AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

Anger is a significant risk factor for adolescent violence. While adolescent violence is a prevalent public health problem in the United States, it remains understudied in rural settings. To better craft adolescent violence interventions, it is important to examine anger and identify its most significant associated factors. This study emphasizes the importance of examining the myriad structural, community, interpersonal, and individual-level factors that contribute to anger in adolescents, which is often a precursor to violent behavior.

## **DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTING A MAIL-BASED OVERDOSE EDUCATION AND NALOXONE DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM IN COMMUNITY SUPERVISION SETTINGS DURING COVID-19**

This study used the Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment (EPIS) model to retrospectively describe a mail-based overdose education and naloxone distribution (OEND) program developed in collaboration with the Kentucky Department of Corrections (DOC) for use in the HEALing Communities Study in Kentucky (HCS-KY) and details the reach of this innovative delivery model. Results showed that mail-based OEND programs are an appropriate delivery method for ensuring access to life-saving medication for people on community supervision and may encourage treatment, but strategies that were high-effort for agency and study staff (e.g., letters) or high-cost (e.g., texting) were not sustainable.

## **RURAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE COMMITTEE RELEASES REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Kansas Rural Justice Initiative Committee was charged with studying the trend toward fewer attorneys living and working in rural Kansas and how it impacts rural Kansans who need legal services. This [report](#) to the Kansas Supreme Court includes 10 recommendations to encourage new attorneys to live and work in rural Kansas, as well as to inspire K-12 students in rural areas to pursue careers in law.

## **AN ENTICING OFFER: HOW SOME RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE WINNING THE COMPETITION FOR NEW CLINICIANS**

At least one third of the physician workforce in the United States is expected to retire over the next decade, just as demand for care among older Americans soars. While all areas of medicine will be affected, two important specialties — primary care and psychiatry — will be particularly hit hard. To counter concerns new hires may feel, some rural employers are creating new ways for them to stay connected to their peers through training and teaching opportunities. This report showcases several potentially replicable strategies for attracting doctors to rural areas.

# ARTICLE

## WISCONSIN'S RURAL HOMELESSNESS CRISIS AND THE FIGHT TO DO 'MORE WITH LESS'

In rural Wisconsin, homelessness is often hidden behind a veil of individuals and families who are couch surfing and sleeping in their vehicles instead of sleeping on city streets or camping out in parks. Despite rural communities having fewer nonprofits than urban ones, shelters and housing assistance programs are leading the way to address the expanse of homelessness in rural Wisconsin. This article explores several solutions rural shelter providers across the state have identified to address the problem: cutting out county governments as the middleman for state reimbursements, increasing the availability of new rental units, consolidating multiple definitions of homelessness, more consistent and proportional state funding, and assistance with case management are just a few.



Image: Joe Timmerman / Wisconsin Watch

# WEBINAR

## IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STALKING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

This webinar presented by the Institute for Coordinated Community Response and SPARC (Stalking, Prevention, Awareness and Resource Center), addresses common stalking tactics, the intersection between stalking and domestic violence, accountability, and collaboration in rural communities.



The webinar includes helpful information such as:

- The prevalence and definition of stalking (6:18)
- Building a rural stalking case (15:35)
- Identifying stalking in rural communities (30:34)
- Stalking and intimate partner violence (40:41)
- Stalking as a lethality risk (43:45)
- Using the SHARP assessment (1:07:31)

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