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## **City of Pittsburgh & Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Launch Pilot Program**

**PITTSBURGH, PA** (December 29, 2021) Mayor William Peduto, the Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire, and the Office of Community Health & Safety is launching a new pilot program Wednesday in partnership with Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank ("The Food Bank") to ensure Pittsburgh residents in crisis with immediate need and high engagements with Public Safety have access to shelf stable food.

This pilot is focused on meeting the immediate needs of residents who are identified through the Office of Community Health & Safety's and Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire's High Utilizer Program. The program, developed by Lt. Chad Hirosky and Dr. Sheila Roth, receives referrals from firefighters and makes home visits to people who frequently call 911 for non-emergency health and safety situations. The goal of the program is to ensure that people maintain dignity and have proper care in their homes. Boxes of shelf stable food provided by the Food Bank will be delivered to these residents through responding firefighters. The Food Bank will then be positioned to connect High Utilizers to pantries that meet their needs and location as well as connect them to further assistance such as SNAP enrollments through the Food Bank's newly developed Community Connections Department.

"This pilot program with the Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire and the Office of Community Health & Safety is one more innovative tool in our toolbox to fulfill our mission, which is to feed people in need and mobilize our community to eliminate hunger. When firefighters identify a household in crisis, we want to be able to provide them with food assistance as quickly as possible. This new initiative gives families immediate support and then further connects them to resources that can provide stability in the future," said President and CEO of Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Lisa Scales.

"Too many members of our community have unmet needs, including food insecurity, that impacts their mental and physical wellbeing," said Mayor William Peduto. "Working with the Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire and OCH&S and the Food Bank, we are able to pair high utilizers of public safety services with shelf stable food to improve the overall health of our residents."



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## **City of Pittsburgh Offering Free Pediatric First Aid, CPR, and Fire Safety Certifications for Childcare Providers**

PITTSBURGH, PA (April 6, 2021) Mayor William Peduto announced today that the City of Pittsburgh will host a free training program for childcare providers to receive state-required pediatric first aid, CPR and fire safety certifications. Biennial certifications are critical to ensuring the safety of children and staff, but can be expensive for childcare facilities who often operate with limited funding and resources. This free course helps to alleviate that cost for the city's childcare facilities, while allowing them to maintain a high standard of safety.

“It can be very difficult and costly for childcare facilities to ensure that their staff members have access to high quality training opportunities. Our program aims to ensure that programs that need this vital training are able to get it and to keep the children in their care safe,” said Tiffini Simoneaux, Youth and Education Manager for the Office of Equity.

Due to safety precautions, the program will be offered in a hybrid format with participants at two physical locations following strict COVID-19 protocols. Virtual video instruction by Pittsburgh paramedics and the Fire Prevention Officer will be broadcast live to training locations. University of Pittsburgh Student EMS monitors will be at each location to verify certifications for participants.

“Bystanders are often the first people on scene of a medical emergency. Providing first aid and CPR training to childcare providers will allow for high quality bystander care to be rendered prior to the arrival of emergency medical personnel and will improve patient outcomes. Pittsburgh EMS is proud to safely provide this training and encourages everyone to learn CPR,” Pittsburgh Bureau of EMS Assistant Chief Pinchalk said.

Fire Prevention Officer Lisa Epps-Cuda added that, “Fire safety is a necessary part of emergency preparedness and every family and business must have a fire safety plan in place. Childcare facilities are no exception. I am looking forward to sharing this information with childcare providers throughout the City of Pittsburgh to make sure that in the event of an emergency, these facilities know exactly what to do and how to stay safe.”

Upon completion of this course, each participant will receive an American Heart Association Heartsaver Pediatric First Aid and CPR/AED certification, as well as a Fire Safety certificate at no cost.

The all-day training will be hosted by the Office of Equity, Bureau of EMS and Bureau of Fire in partnership with Trying Together and the Early Learning Resource Center Region 5. Trainings will be held on Saturday, April 10 at 10:00 a.m. Registration is required and space is limited. Childcare staff and early learning professionals who work or reside in the City of Pittsburgh are eligible to participate in this program and can sign up [here](#).



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## **City and AHN to Partner on Support for Those Experiencing Homelessness**

PITTSBURGH, PA (July 13, 2020) The City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny Health Network are creating a new model for responding to the needs of those experiencing homelessness, problematic substance abuse and unaddressed mental health issues.

The program from the Office of Mayor William Peduto, Office of Management and Budget, and Department of Public Safety and AHN's Center for Inclusion Health will build street outreach community-based teams that will connect people with services, housing resources, and health supports, collaborating with first responders to prevent continued engagement and promote healthier outcomes.

This program is funded by a portion of the "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act" or the "CARES Act" funds allocated to the City.

The funding opportunity, [which was announced April 28th](#), was developed in response to longstanding calls from the community and Public Safety to provide more robust supports to individuals with unmet needs in Pittsburgh communities. Often, first responders from Pittsburgh Public Safety respond to calls to address these needs but are not provided with the tools to do so.

"As part of the Center for Inclusion Health's ongoing commitment to health equity for vulnerable and marginalized populations in our region, especially persons experiencing homelessness, we are extremely grateful to have been awarded this funding. We look forward to working with the City of Pittsburgh to create innovative street outreach models that help mitigate risks posed by the compounding public health crises of homelessness, COVID-19, and social exclusion," said [Patrick Perri, MD](#), Medical Director, AHN Center for Inclusion Health.

The program aligns with a "Housing First" model, aimed at ensuring that people are able to access housing without barriers, while acknowledging and addressing health as a critical part of stable housing and wellbeing. COVID-19 has resulted in increased housing instability and crises, and as such, we anticipate continued calls to first responders.

The agreement between the City and AHN will be introduced to Pittsburgh City Council tomorrow.



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## **City Announces Plans for an Office of Community Health and Safety**

PITTSBURGH, PA (June 12, 2020) The Office of Mayor William Peduto, Office of Equity and Department of Public Safety have announced their blueprint for a new Office of Community Health and Safety. The office will redirect city resources to better meet community needs by housing social services, public health and social work experts who can assist first responders in situations that require longer-term assistance, harm reduction support and other services.

“Our public safety personnel are available 24/7 but often go into situations that are beyond the scope of their training. The individuals and communities they encounter need help beyond law enforcement or emergency medical attention,” Mayor William Peduto said. “This office will allow public safety to step back and determine what kind of support an individual or family needs and get them that help through social workers or other agencies so that we're seeing people holistically and connecting them with more sustainable resources and assistance.”

The proposed office will operate under the co-direction of the Department of Public Safety and Office of the Mayor. The goals and directives of the office are to:

1. Develop community health and safety priorities and areas of focus based on community input and areas of need most frequently encountered by public safety personnel.
2. Establish a group of community health and safety advisors made up of public health leaders to advise, educate, support and inform on best practices for sustainable social and health support in city programs, policies and legislation.
3. Conduct regular trainings with all public safety personnel designed in collaboration between staff, experts and communities to ensure first responders are prepared to appropriately engage with complex situations that may require additional harm reduction support.
4. Collaborate with higher education programs throughout the city to provide training opportunities for social work students to help respond to community needs.

The preliminary areas of focus for community support include:

- Racism
- Violence
- Poverty

- Environmental Health
- Mental Health
- Homelessness
- Problematic Substance Use and Overdose Prevention
- Training and Education
- Criminal Justice Reform & Re-entry
- Youth Engagement
- Community Paramedicine and Decreasing Public Safety Overutilization
- Trans-health and Wellbeing
- Jurisdictional Inequity
- Harm Reduction
- Maternal-Child Health
- Suicide Prevention
- Supports for People with Disabilities

These areas of focus are dynamic and subject to change based on input from the community and situations most commonly encountered by public safety personnel.

"This initiative will give the community relations units in all bureaus as well as all police officers, firefighters and emergency medical personnel the support that is critical to improving not just our high standards of service, but also our relationships with the community," said Public Safety Director Wendell Hissrich.

The Mayor's Office and Department of Public Safety will work with City Council to determine reallocations in the 2021 budget and identify additional external funding opportunities for this initiative.



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## **City to Implement Pre-Arrest Diversion Program for Low-Level Crimes**

PITTSBURGH, PA (July 20, 2020) The City of Pittsburgh and CONNECT have been awarded funds to develop and implement a public health-focused, pre-arrest diversion program for people who commit low-level crimes stemming from behavioral health issues, including those whose crimes are related mental health and poverty as well problematic substance use.

The funds are from the Allegheny County Health Department's Overdose Data to Action CDC grant and will directly align with the City's public health focus in the new Office of Community Health and Safety. Legislation accepting the support will be introduced to Pittsburgh City Council tomorrow.

This pilot program will:

1. Work to ensure that participants do NOT enter the criminal justice system;
2. Support people who have high engagement with police (specifically associated with crimes of poverty) and instead refer to social services and supports;
3. Be harm reduction-based (i.e., participants have agency and identify goals).

"We know that cycling people through the criminal justice system does not improve outcomes. Our goal is to continue to work with the community, county partners, public safety, and CONNECT to interrupt this cycle by implementing public health-informed practices like diversion," Mayor William Peduto said.

Zone 1 was identified as the place for the first pilot with the goal of expanding it city-wide (and regionally, in partnership with CONNECT). The Northside is the only place in the county with a formal youth diversion program, which is run by Foundation of HOPE and funded by Dollar Bank, Buhl Foundation, and Pittsburgh Foundation.

"Our objective is to understand the strengths of all models to — in partnership with the community — develop sustainable, scalable, effective ways to connect people with durable supports that promote health, safety and well being. We will work to create a public health-driven approach that results in improved outcomes for residents and communities," Zone 1 Commander Christopher Ragland said.

Lydia Morin, executive director of CONNECT, said "CONNECT is always proud to partner with our members like City of Pittsburgh, with support from Allegheny County Health Department, to listen and respond to the needs of our community and public safety, and our collaborative works to continue developing public health-informed diversion programs to provide support for the people who use drugs in our region."





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## **Dr. Sheila Roth Joins City of Pittsburgh Office of Community Health and Safety as Continuum of Support Program Manager**

PITTSBURGH, PA (May 17, 2021) Dr. Sheila Roth, PhD, LCSW, EMT, who is the Director of Carlow University's Masters of Social Work program, is joining the City's Office of Community Health and Safety as the Continuum of Support Program Manager. Dr. Roth will oversee the social work and support professionals working in the community and work with local partners and Public Safety to evaluate national best practices in co-response, crisis prevention, and post-engagement care as part of the Public Safety continuum. Dr. Roth will collaborate directly with the community, providers, and Public Safety professionals to strengthen the continuum of support in the city with a focus on ensuring that the "right responder" works with residents.

"We are pleased to announce that Dr. Roth is joining the Office of Community Health and Safety team," said Mayor William Peduto. "She has an impressive and longstanding record for her local leadership in social work and commitment to community health, safety and equity throughout the city of Pittsburgh. Dr. Roth understands the needs of our communities, our social workers, and our first responders to help create a more effective continuum of support for our residents."

Dr. Roth began her career as a hospital-based social worker and has 35 years of experience working in the health and mental health care fields. She was a founding member of Carlow University's Bachelors of Social Work Program in 1993 and co-developer of Carlow's Master's of Social Work (MSW) Program in 2018. Dr. Roth will remain the Director of the MSW program at Carlow, and will build partnerships with academic partners, local students, and professionals to provide community support.

"We're honored to have Dr. Roth serve our city in this role," said Carlow University President Suzanne Mellon, PhD. "It is such a vital time for Pittsburgh to pursue equity, something we've long focused on at Carlow. We look forward to Dr. Roth's strong leadership in this role and how this partnership opportunity will further our collective equity efforts."

Dr. Roth also brings to this new role 30 years of experience in behavioral health practice at the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Emergency Medicine. Dr. Roth is a behavioral health member of the Allegheny County/City of Pittsburgh Critical Incident Stress Management team, a guest instructor in the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police's Academy, and a certified EMT with 5 years of volunteer work with a local EMS service.





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## **Mayor Peduto Highlights Successes of the Office of Community Health & Safety in Reimagining 21<sup>st</sup> Century Public Health & Safety**

**PITTSBURGH, PA** (December 30, 2021) The Office of Community Health & Safety (OCH&S), created by Mayor William Peduto has developed nationally-recognized partnerships to create a new model of public health and safety.

- Joined CONNECT, Allegheny County Health Department, Allegheny County Department of Human Services, and partners countywide to develop Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) in the City of Pittsburgh
- [Partnered with Allegheny Health Network's Urban Health and Street Medicine](#) Program, which worked with more than 700 people through more 4,000 unique interactions and more than 500 Public Safety co-responses and opened the [Downtown Community Outreach Hub](#)
- Received American Rescue Plan funding to expand the AHN co-response partnership citywide
- Hired the City's first Community Social Workers to enhance co-response, high utilizer programming, and victim assistance support
- Supported Mayor Peduto's [executive order](#) decriminalizing the possession, distribution, and use of fentanyl test strips for harm reduction purposes in the City of Pittsburgh
- Started the High Utilizer Program in June, in partnership with Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire, to work with individuals with untreated medical issues or high engagement with 911, which included support of 41 people with more than 500 calls to the Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire via 911
- Expanded the High Utilizer Program in December to work with Pittsburgh EMS to connect people with social and health services
- [Awarded](#) technical assistance by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Bureau of Justice Assistance as one of three cities nationally to develop crisis response and intervention teams and entered into a [data sharing agreement](#) with University of Cincinnati to improve crisis response
- Worked with more than 800 survivors of crime in the City of Pittsburgh, in partnership with the Office of Community Services & Violence Prevention, to ensure that people had access to services, support, and legal resources
- Initiated the country's third and Commonwealth's first [prehospital buprenorphine program](#) in partnership with Pittsburgh Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to treat individuals experiencing opioid-related withdrawal symptoms or people post-overdose

- Trained more than 300 city staff members (including police recruits, City Law Department, City Parks staff, lifeguards), city authority staff, and Civic Leadership Academy participants to recognize and respond to opioid-related overdoses and incorporated overdose prevention training for all new City of Pittsburgh employees as part of the Human Resources and Civil Service Department's orientation
- Created the [overdose dashboard](#), in partnership with Pittsburgh EMS, to ensure regular sharing of opioid-related overdose insights
- Worked with Allegheny Health Network, Highmark, Pittsburgh EMS and CitiParks to launch [SwimSafe](#), a program designed to mitigate risks of unintentional injury and death associated with recreational swimming for children, distributing personal floatation devices and resources to more than 200 Pittsburgh families
- Developed the [Neighborhood Health & Safety Academy](#), with support from the Staunton Farm Foundation, to empower residents through series of sessions to discuss services and resources that exist within Pittsburgh; [launched community applications](#). Apply [here](#).
- Launched the Community Health & Safety [Listening Campaign](#) to engage with all residents and learn from neighbors how our office and communities can develop and sustain successful services and partnerships [take the survey [here](#)]

For more information about OCH&S, reach out to [ochspgh@pittsburghpa.gov](mailto:ochspgh@pittsburghpa.gov) or find us as [www.pittsburghpa.gov/ochs](http://www.pittsburghpa.gov/ochs)



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## **Mayor Peduto Signs Executive Order Related to Fentanyl Test Strips for overdose prevention on Overdose Awareness Day**

PITTSBURGH, PA (August 31, 2021) Mayor William Peduto issued an Executive Order today calling to allow the possession and use of fentanyl test strips, a key opioid overdose prevention tool, in the City of Pittsburgh. The Order also directs the City of Pittsburgh Office of Community Health and Safety (OCH&S) to work with city employees and the public to educate them on the benefits of these lifesaving tools and to reduce the stigma associated with possessing them.

Fentanyl test strips have been proven to prevent opioid overdoses and save lives as they allow users to identify the presence of fentanyl in unregulated drugs including injectable drugs, powders and pills. Awareness of fentanyl allows individuals to use appropriate harm reduction strategies to reduce the risk of an overdose.

Fentanyl is an extremely potent opioid that can quickly stop breathing and cause an opioid overdose, which can lead to death. Opioid use disorder is a leading cause of preventable death in the United States and the regional rate of overdose deaths has accelerated faster than national averages, with countywide overdose deaths increasing 22% from 2019 to 2020, with fentanyl present in 77% of those deaths.

According to a recent [public service announcement](#) from OCH&S, there have been reports of increased presence of fentanyl in “heroin, cocaine, crack, methamphetamine, benzodiazepines, ecstasy and counterfeit pills such as Percocet and Xanax [in the Greater Pittsburgh area]. While fentanyl has been present in the heroin supply for several years in this region, there are increasing reports of other, non-opioid drugs that have been cut with or contaminated by fentanyl.”

With this executive order, the City of Pittsburgh joins the Pennsylvania Attorney General and Allegheny County District Attorney in adopting a policy to not arrest individuals who possess or distribute fentanyl test strips for harm reduction purposes.

The pandemic has exacerbated mental health conditions, economic stressors and caused individuals to use drugs alone in larger amounts with increased frequency, which are common risk factors for unsafe opioid use. The presence of fentanyl also contributes to deepening racial inequity, with Black men experiencing a 200% increase in overdose deaths from 2019-2020 over the same time period in 2018-2019.

“Fentanyl test strips have been identified by the Centers for Disease Control and other expert organizations as a critical tool in preventing opioid-related overdoses and deaths,” said Mayor Peduto. “Other policies have stigmatized drug use, but yet we are still seeing the number of opioid overdoses climbing. I have signed this executive order on International Overdose Awareness Day because if we have the tools to help prevent overdose deaths, it is our responsibility to help healthcare providers, outreach organizations and municipal government get them to our communities.”

A full copy of the executive order is available [here](#).



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## **OCH&S Expands Team to Reimagine Public Health and Safety**

**PITTSBURGH, PA** (December 28, 2021) Mayor William Peduto and the Office of Community Health and Safety (OCH&S) have expanded their team to address issues surrounding health, safety, and community access to care. The first three Community Social Workers joining OCH&S will be focusing on crisis co-response and situation triage, mental and behavioral health resource connections, high utilizer engagement and care in partnership with Pittsburgh's Bureaus of Fire and Emergency Medical Services, pre-charge diversion referral for youth and adults, and support for survivors of crime.

**Anmol Baxi, MSW**, was previously a Clinical Social Worker at UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside, working closely with outpatient clients, which included conducting psychosocial assessments and responding to mental and behavioral health crises. Anmol also worked as an Emergency Department Social Worker and before that as a Behavioral Health Therapist Intern for UPMC, linking patients with housing, substance, and domestic violence resources, while also facilitating psychoeducational and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy for adults.

**Elizabeth Curtis, MSW**, is a licensed social worker with experience in roles related to casework, service coordination and mental health therapy for students with emotional and behavioral disturbances, having worked at for several local social service organizations including Family Links Inc., Family Resources, and Allegheny County Child Youth and Family Services. In her role as a school-based therapist, she led daily group and individual therapy sessions for students in an Emotional Support setting, participated in individualized education plan meetings, and provided crisis interventions in the classroom setting as needed for her students. Beth also worked recently as a social worker at Primary Care Health Services, where she assisted with community engagement and supported Allegheny County Health Department around the efforts to combat Covid-19."

**Nathaniel Morley, MSW**, has spent the last 17 years of his career as a social worker at KidsVoice, where he engaged in assessments, investigation and advocacy. He also worked on the FamilyLinks Mobile Crisis Team, where he frequently responded to community crisis calls. Nate is trained and has certifications in Comprehensive Crisis Management (CCM), Non-Violent Physical Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI), Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) and Psychological First-Aid.

The three new Community Social Workers will be joining the existing OCH&S team in early January. More information about the OCH&S team is available [here](#).



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## **Office of Community Health and Safety Selected for National League of Cities Community Health Cohort**

PITTSBURGH, PA (February 5, 2021) The City of Pittsburgh's Office of Community Health and Safety (OCHS), in partnership with Allegheny Health Network's Center for Inclusion Health, has been selected to join the National League of Cities' (NLC) [Cities of Opportunity](#) for [Cities and Health Systems Community of Practice](#) cohort. The cohort provides an in-depth learning network led by NLC in partnership with the Center to Advance Community Health & Equity (CACHE) to foster and strengthen collaboration between municipal governments, health systems stakeholders and community partners to address root causes of poor health and advance equity in Pittsburgh.

"We'd like to thank NLC and Cities of Opportunity for selecting the City of Pittsburgh for this cohort," said Mayor William Peduto. "As a new city office, OCHS has the opportunity to bring a fresh perspective to the way the City and its health system partners deliver services and create real, sustainable change for the health and safety of our communities. We look forward to creating a model for Pittsburgh and the country for how we can work with our world-class health systems to leverage partnerships, work together, listen to the community and design our systems to respond to the root causes and real needs of residents with resources that help in both the immediate and long term."

The Cities of Opportunity initiative helps local leaders address holistic, interconnected factors that affect residents' health and safety and build resiliency in all communities. The City of Pittsburgh was among 22 municipalities from across the country selected to participate in Cities of Opportunity. Over the next several months, Pittsburgh will be working with nine other local governments specifically in the Cities and Health Systems Community of Practice cohort to assess and address structural, economic, policy and systemic barriers to health equity for marginalized communities. Pittsburgh was additionally selected within the cohort as one of two cities to receive additional support on this community health and safety initiative from the Public Health Institute.

The City of Pittsburgh was selected for the initiative due to the City's demonstrated commitment to advancing programs, policies and practices that advance health equity in our community. Additionally, the City has a proven track record of bringing together various multi-sector stakeholders committed to improving the health and well-being of all Pittsburgh residents.

OCHS plans to use this opportunity to work with cohort cities to grow the partnership model with the [Allegheny Health Network\(AHN\) Program for Homeless and Urban Poverty Medicine](#). The model will identify opportunities for cities and health systems to improve health equity and community outcomes. The intention is to create a replicable partnership model to expand the initiative with other valuable health stakeholders citywide.

"The pandemic has exacerbated health and safety inequities in our communities, particularly related to the social determinants of health, trust in systems, accessibility of care, systemic racism and communication within systems and with the community," said OCHS Manager Laura Drogowski. "We hope to learn from national leaders to be accountable and build a

community-driven continuum of support. We believe in the critical mission and foundational work of the AHN Center for Inclusion Health and will focus on the expertise that is already in our community to continue to build our partnerships and better support residents.”

“As part of our ongoing partnership with the City of Pittsburgh to create innovative street outreach models that help mitigate risks posed by the compounding public health crises of homelessness, Allegheny Health Network is extremely pleased and honored to participate in this cohort. We look forward to demonstrating how local governments and health systems can work together to achieve health equity for vulnerable and marginalized populations,” said Dan Palka, Administrative Director, AHN Program for Homeless and Urban Poverty Medicine.

“The root causes of poor health, or the factors influencing how well we live and how long we live, lead to distinct inequities resulting in significant differences in the quality and length of life among residents across the country,” said Sue Polis, Director of Health and Wellness at the National League of Cities. “The National League of Cities is proud to work with the City of Pittsburgh in its efforts to turn this unprecedented time and its myriad of challenges into an opportunity to build a new, bright and more equitable future for all Pittsburgh residents.”

The Cities of Opportunity Community of Practice began in January 2021 and will run through July 2021. The work is generously supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



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## **Office Of Community Health & Safety Announces Opening Of Applications For Neighborhood Health & Safety Academy**

**PITTSBURGH, PA** (December 28, 2021) Mayor William Peduto and the Office of Community Health & Safety has announced the opening of applications for the Neighborhood Health & Safety Academy. The 2-month Academy will provide 20 community members with education and training, empowering residents to continue to play an active role in providing for the health, safety, and wellbeing of their neighbors. Applicants will participate in 10 sessions and receive a \$600 stipend for their time. Pittsburgh residents are encouraged to apply [here](#). Applications will be reviewed following the January 31st, 2022 application deadline.

In July 2021, the Office of Community Health and Safety announced a \$17,500 grant awarded by the [Staunton Farm Foundation](#) to launch a Neighborhood Health & Safety Academy. While community members are intimately familiar with the needs of their neighbors and neighborhoods, knowing the most effective way to meet those needs can be a challenge. The Neighborhood Health & Safety Academy will provide education and information focused on housing, substance use and harm reduction, mental health, food security, violence prevention, police and criminal justice reform, homelessness, aging, and youth empowerment. Participants will also have access to free certifications and skills training in CPR, opioid overdose care, naloxone administration, mental health first aid, de-escalation, bleeding control, federal benefits application workshop, public housing application workshop, sexual assault survivor assistance and advocate training, financial empowerment, and motivational interviewing.

“Community members are uniquely positioned to identify and understand the needs of their neighbors and are often best suited to provide assistance,” said Mayor William Peduto. “The Office of Community Health & Safety is exploring innovative ways to prevent crises before they occur. The Neighborhood Health & Safety Academy will empower residents who are already leaders within their communities to become more effective helpers and address the needs of their neighbors.”

Joni Schwager, executive director of the Staunton Farm Foundation said, “As a Foundation, we are committed to investing in the wellbeing of our neighbors and proud to fund the Neighborhood Health & Safety Academy pilot to support the first class of leaders.”

### **About the Staunton Farm Foundation**

The Staunton Farm Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of people who live



with mental illness and substance use disorders. The Foundation works to enhance behavioral health treatment, support, and recovery through grant making to nonprofit organizations in 10 southwestern Pennsylvania counties (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland).



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## **Office of Community Health and Safety Expands Team to Enhance Efforts on Social Work, Community Engagement and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion**

Pittsburgh, PA (October 7, 2021) The City of Pittsburgh's new Office of Community Health and Safety (OCH&S) has expanded their team to help provide the Continuum of Support Program to address longstanding health, safety and justice issues in our communities. The four newly hired staff will focus on community engagement, diversion, co-response and post-engagement care.

Photo: Ilan Berkman

**Alexandra Abboud, MSW, LSW**, joins the OCH&S team as the Social Work Manager. Abboud previously served as the Victim Assistance Coordinator in the City's Department of Public Safety, where she provided trauma-informed care, advocacy and resources for victims of crime. Her expertise includes crisis intervention, harm reduction practices, survivor supports and youth engagement. In her prior role, she assisted OCH&S in developing the Continuum of Support Program. As Social Work Manager, she will supervise social work staff who will support individuals with needs outside of the traditional public safety response, work with survivors of crime and assist in the development of public safety/social worker co-response programs.

**Eric Williams, MURP**, serves as the Community Engagement Coordinator for OCH&S following two years as a Community Liaison for the City's Office of Community Affairs, where he presented citywide services and events to community organizations. Prior to joining the City, Williams was a Community Development Consultant for Peace Corps in Albania, where he established a food bank to address food insecurity for one thousand residents. Williams will bring his community engagement expertise to work closely with community members, groups and faith-based organizations in Pittsburgh to ensure that community members are partners in the development of OCH&S programs and services.

**Camila Alarcon-Chelecki, MSPPM**, comes to OCH&S as the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Project Coordinator. Alarcon-Chelecki has worked as a political consultant and project design manager. She also served as Director of Development for Guatemala Visible, working with youth throughout South America to support thriving communities and prevent cartel-related violence through educational and economic opportunities. As LEAD Project Coordinator, Alarcon-Chelecki will design, implement and manage LEAD throughout the City of Pittsburgh in collaboration with the Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT), community-based providers, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, Allegheny County leadership and community members.

Photo: Ilan Berkman

**Malaysia Smith** is the LEAD Community Engagement Coordinator. Smith comes to OCH&S from the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, where she was a portability specialist providing case management, client interaction and advocacy for residents. Smith previously worked as a communications coordinator for all projects at Just Harvest, where she established and hosted educational programs, stakeholder and public meetings and developed community outreach plans. As the LEAD Community Engagement Coordinator, Smith will work closely with CONNECT, residents, officers and community organizations to integrate feedback into program planning and will promote partnerships between the community and OCH&S.

The four new staff members join the existing team which includes OCH&S Manager Laura Drogowski; Continuum of Support Program Manager [Dr. Sheila Roth](#), PhD, MSW, LCSW, EMT; Overdose Prevention Coordinator Joshua Schneider, EMT; Operations Administrator Brennan Coleman; and master-level social work interns and Coro Pittsburgh fellows. More information about the OCH&S team is available [\\_](#)



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## **Office of Community Health and Safety Receives Grant for Neighborhood Health and Safety Academy Pilot**

PITTSBURGH, PA (July 6, 2021) The City of Pittsburgh's new Office of Community Health and Safety (OCHS) has received a \$17,500 grant from the [Staunton Farm Foundation](#) for the launch of their Neighborhood Health and Safety Academy pilot. This initiative aims to empower communities and neighbors with certifications, resources and skills to play an active role in providing for the wellness, health, safety, and wellbeing of their neighbors.

While community members are intimately familiar with the needs of their neighbors and neighborhoods, knowing the most effective way to meet those needs can be a challenge. The Neighborhood Health and Safety Academy will be a two month training and education series for 20 residents to learn about the regional public safety and social service landscape so they are better equipped to identify and provide support in their communities. The majority of this grant funding will be used to provide stipends to selected attendees to reduce barriers to participation.

"Nobody knows the needs of our communities better than our community members," said Mayor William Peduto. "The Neighborhood Health and Safety Academy will bring together community leaders to share what's happening in their neighborhoods so we get a better sense of where they need support, but also will provide them the tools, resources, training and connections to services they need to help address neighborhood concerns."

Participants will learn about the public safety and health continuum of response to a wide range of issues. Educational trainings will focus on areas like housing, substance use, mental health, food security, violence prevention, police reform, criminal justice reform, homelessness, aging and youth. Each session will explore these topics from multiple angles by focusing on history, intersections of policy and practice, and a deep discussion of how each topic interfaces with poverty and systemic racism.

Participants will also have access to free certifications and skills training in CPR, opioid overdose care, naloxone administration, mental health first aid, de-escalation, bleeding control, federal benefits application workshop, public housing application workshop, sexual assault survivor assistance, advocate training, financial empowerment, and motivational interviewing.

"Community members have made it clear that they want to have a more direct role in providing for the health, safety, and wellbeing of their neighbors," said OCHS'

Overdose Prevention Coordinator, Joshua Schneider. “The Neighborhood Health and Safety Academy aims to help residents navigate systems and understand how to provide direct support to prevent crises.”

The Neighborhood Health and Safety Academy pilot is being designed based on feedback provided by the community through the City’s [EngagePGH platform](#) to ensure course material and subject areas are relevant to what neighborhoods are experiencing and content will be guided by a board of community advisors. The 20 members of the Neighborhood Health and Safety Academy inaugural class will become community ambassadors that will continue to work with the Office of Community Health and Safety to address community needs and consult on future initiatives.

“Staunton Farm Foundation is committed to building healthy and thriving communities,” said Joni Schwager of Staunton Farm Foundation. “We are excited to support the Office of Community Health and Safety, Pittsburgh residents, and community-based trainers to promote safety and health for everyone.”

#### About the Staunton Farm Foundation

The Staunton Farm Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of people who live with mental illness and substance use disorders. The Foundation works to enhance behavioral health treatment, support, and recovery through grant making to nonprofit organizations in 10 southwestern Pennsylvania counties (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland).



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## **Pittsburgh Bureau of EMS Encourages Safe Swimming with Youth Life Vest Giveaway**

PITTSBURGH, PA (June 21, 2021) -- Members from the Pittsburgh Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Citiparks, and the Office of Community Health and Safety will be distributing youth-sized personal flotation devices (life vests) and safe swimming information packets to youth and parents at three of the City's [summer lunch grab-and-go locations](#) on Wednesday, June 23.

The Safe Swim initiative, led by EMS, aims to increase swimming and water safety throughout the City of Pittsburgh. The initiative began last summer in response to the widespread closures of community pools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased the possibility of children and youth swimming in less-supervised settings, such as backyard pools or open water.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, after motor vehicle crashes, drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death among children ages 1-14. There is an additional racial disparity, as Black children ages 10-14 years drown at rates 7.6 times higher than other children.

Thanks to a donation of youth-sized personal flotation devices from Allegheny Health Network and Highmark, the initiative will provide the free life vests and educational materials to encourage children and parents to adopt safe swimming practices this summer.

The life vests will be available at the Mellon, Beechview, and Troy Hill [spray parks](#) from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.



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## **Pittsburgh to Enter into Data Sharing Agreement with University of Cincinnati to Enhance Police Crisis Training and Co-Response**

PITTSBURGH, PA (December 6, 2021) - This week, Mayor William Peduto will submit to Council a resolution to authorize entry into a data use agreement with the University of Cincinnati's (UC) Center for Police Research and Policy (CPRP). This agreement allows the CPRP to evaluate outcomes of training and technical assistance for the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police (PBP). This partnership is part of the "Academic Training to Inform Police Responses" grant awarded to the City by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to inform a national model for crisis response intervention team-building and Public Safety training.

The CPRP's research and evaluation are led by Robin Engel, PhD, Director of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and CPRP. Dr. Engel and the CPRP have a longstanding history of providing such assistance, including technical assistance work with the Philadelphia Police Department and the Pennsylvania State Police, contributing to response to people with mental health conditions and intellectual and development disabilities. Dr. Engel explained, "It is critical to establish partnerships with Public Safety providers to safely respond to persons in crisis and to provide responders with additional training to ensure that they engage co- and alternative response teams."

"I want to commend Public Safety Director Hissrich, Chief of Police Schubert, and OCH&S Manager Drogowski on this new effort. This is one critical piece of our new model of public health and safety," said Mayor William Peduto.

Sheila Roth, PhD, LCSW, EMT, Continuum of Support Program Manager in the City's Office of Community Health & Safety (OCH&S), emphasized how technical assistance is critical in preparing PBP officers, AHN Urban Health team members, and OCH&S Community Social Workers for safe co-responses to crises, "This is about building a continuum of support to ensure that the right responder is dispatched to provide engagement at the point of crisis and to provide ongoing care for our community members. We know that first responders are called for myriad needs in our community. With this partnership, we will collaborate with University of Cincinnati and the International Association of Chiefs of Police to elevate community voice, provider experience, best practices, and data to create comprehensive, trauma-informed responses."

"We are grateful for the opportunity to both build and iteratively evaluate our crisis response while working with the Center for Police Research and Policy to inform training for first responders across the nation," said Wendell Hissrich, Director of Public Safety Director. Director Hissrich expressed confidence that this collaboration will result in safer, person-centered response to City's residents, "through this collaboration, the evaluation will inform culture change and equip Public Safety personnel with training that enables improved care for individuals with unmet needs."



This partnership is part of the City's technical assistance grant "Academic Training to Inform Police Responses" awarded by the BJA and the IACP to the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police to inform a national model for crisis response intervention team-building and Public Safety training. This is a joint initiative between UC, Community Health & Safety, Public Safety, and the Bureau of Police.



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## **Pittsburgh EMS Becomes Third in the Country to Provide Lifesaving Prehospital Buprenorphine for Opioid Overdoses**

PITTSBURGH, PA (November 22, 2021) The Office of Community Health and Safety has announced that a pilot group of Pittsburgh Emergency Medical Services (EMS) paramedics have completed training to administer prehospital buprenorphine and began implementing the practice over the weekend. In September, the Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of EMS approved the City of Pittsburgh EMS' Prehospital Buprenorphine Pilot Program, making Pittsburgh the third city in the country to implement this lifesaving intervention.

While all City of Pittsburgh Public Safety Bureau personnel are trained to administer naloxone (Narcan) in order to effectively provide life-saving rescue therapy to individuals experiencing overdoses, buprenorphine is regularly used by hospitals and physicians to treat opioid use disorder and opioid withdrawal, which is often experienced after naloxone is administered.

As part of the pilot, Advanced Life Support EMS units will be able to administer buprenorphine to patients experiencing opioid withdrawal regardless if that patient decides to go to the hospital. Patients will then be able to schedule a virtual follow up with the UPMC Medical Toxicology Bridge Clinic to have a consultation with a doctor within 24 hours to get a buprenorphine prescription and be connected to other critical harm reduction resources.

"The opioid epidemic has deeply affected so many cities and communities. If tools like buprenorphine exist, we need to have them in our communities and with our emergency medical personnel," said Mayor William Peduto. "I'd like to thank the Department of Public Safety, Pittsburgh EMS and the Office of Community Health and Safety for their continued leadership here in our communities and nationally to provide real solutions to those with substance use disorder."

"Pittsburgh EMS has continually led the way, operating on the cutting edge of prehospital medical advancements," said Public Safety Director Wendell Hissrich. "We want to continue to support our community members through field-based implementation of medical practices to save lives."

The pilot program was designed by the [Bureau of EMS](#) in partnership with the [Office of Community Health and Safety](#) and will run for one year.

As part of the expansion of public health-informed overdose prevention initiatives, the

City of Pittsburgh will also begin distribution of fentanyl test strips, following Mayor Peduto's [executive order in August](#) allowing for the possession and use of these prevention tools. This has been made possible by funding from the Staunton Farm Foundation and their public health leadership.



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## **Pittsburgh Police and Office of Community Health and Safety Selected to Develop Crisis Response and Intervention Team Co-Response Model**

PITTSBURGH, PA (July 12, 2021) The City of Pittsburgh's Office of Community Health and Safety (OCHS) and Bureau of Police have been awarded a Crisis Response and Intervention Team (CRIT) technical assistance and training grant from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Administration to further develop an effective model for police to identify what co-responders can best help in emergency situations.

As the City expands its program of co-response to ensure those experiencing behavioral health conditions, like mental health and substance use, and intellectual and development disabilities receive appropriate support for emergency calls, the CRIT program will further equip police officers to call in the right co-responders who can make appropriate referrals. The initiative will increase police's access to training, technical assistance and other resources to develop and deliver multilayered approaches for people whose needs are outside the realm of traditional law enforcement.

Through this program police will have support to strategically plan crisis response teams, expand relationships with support services and community-based resources, train officers and partners and develop a co-responder academy from national subject matter experts and local partners.

"As the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police partners with OCHS to develop co-response, alternative response, diversion and enhanced recruit and officer training, it is essential that officers who are dispatched to calls involving people experiencing mental health, substance use and other challenges are well-supported and trained to safely and compassionately address needs," said Pittsburgh Police Academy Sergeant Colleen Bristow.

OCHS and Police aim to use this opportunity for the following goals:

- Police officers and crisis response teams will be able to recognize individuals in crisis, or at risk of experiencing crisis.
- Police crisis response teams will ensure that people experiencing a crisis are given proper care, time, and referrals, including the sub-dispatch of right responders.
- Police and partners will have meaningful relationships to ensure that individuals with behavioral health conditions and/or intellectual and development disabilities are connected to resources or aid and diverted from the criminal

legal system.

- The safety for all community members is the top priority for police and staff.

“The Pittsburgh Bureau of Police is committed to ensuring safer and more supportive interactions with people experiencing mental health challenges and the development of crisis response policy and practice that benefits community stakeholders in general,” said Police Employee Wellness and Resource coordinator Officer Matt Schlick.

Pittsburgh was one of three cities selected to be a part of this Bureau of Justice Assistance’s [Academic Training to Inform Police Responses](#) initiative and the only city selected for enhanced technical assistance. The initiative is managed by the University of Cincinnati School of Criminal Justice with its partners Policy Research Associates, The Arc of the United States’ National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability and the International Association of Chiefs of Police.



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## **Pittsburgh Police Giving Recruits Cutting-Edge New Training on Homelessness**

PITTSBURGH, PA (January 27, 2020) Under changes implemented by the Peduto Administration, Pittsburgh police recruits are receiving unique training to understand the experiences of residents who are homeless, the availability of services, and the impact of public safety involvement on displaced people, through the “Homelessness Academy” program at the police training academy.

The program is being implemented by the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police in conjunction with the Office of Community Health & Safety in Mayor William Peduto’s office, and the Department of Public Safety’s Office of Community Services and Violence Prevention.

The programs are part of Mayor Peduto’s efforts to give front-line workers more support when interacting with residents in desperate need of social services, and a reassessment generally of the City’s relations with displaced people.

For many police, the first time in their lives that they ever come into contact with a homeless resident is when they start on the job as a police officer. To ease that transition the Homelessness Academy gives recruits background on complexities that people experience living outside, trauma, reasons why people do not stay in shelters, and how polices can help by engaging responsive supportive services.

After the initial Homelessness Academy trainings recruits were surveyed for their reactions: 28% reported they had never had a conversation with someone experiencing homelessness before, and 71% said the training gave them a better familiarity with the issue.

Through the program recruits hear first-hand from a community advocate who experienced homelessness, learn from an Allegheny Health Network official on the unique challenges facing residents experiencing homelessness, and review the resources police can deploy to assist people.

The academy — borne out of collaborative efforts with the Homeless Outreach Coordination Committee and Resource Office — is a joint initiative with OCHS, which Mayor Peduto launched last summer to oversee social and public health services supporting community members and first responders who regularly interface with residents needing assistance and harm reduction support.

It is also a result of [the City’s partnership with AHN’s Center for Inclusion Health](#) to provide street outreach community-based teams to help with service delivery to residents with unmet needs.

“This is a continuation of Police’s years-long focus on building bridges with all communities in Pittsburgh,” Public Safety Director Wendell Hissrich said. “Our goal is to have the best police bureau in the country, with officers who receive training that is second to none. I applaud this multi-agency cooperation the initiative shown by the Police leadership and the Academy in providing this crucial training.”

Police training in Pennsylvania is regulated by the Municipal Police Officers’ Education and Training Commission (MPOETC). Law enforcement agencies are allowed to offer additional training beyond what MPOETC requires, which includes programs like the Homelessness Academy, which is tailored to Pittsburgh’s unique issues.

“This program better prepares recruits to look at social issues with a guardian mindset. It opens their eyes to the reality and the humanity of the situation and provides them with a better understanding of the key issues related to homelessness,” Police Chief Scott Schubert said.

The training program is overseen by Sgt. Colleen Bristow, who has worked to enhance the MPOETC to better prepare officers for community needs, and features remarks by community advocate and leader Kelly Ferri and AHN homeless and urban poverty director Dan Palka, as well as by police leaders who talk to recruits about their experiences and how they build empathy for those living on the street.

“Community members and people working directly in the community are our experts. It is the responsibility of the Office of Community Health & Safety to support residents and first responders by ensuring that services are available, responsive, and low barrier,” OCHS Manager Laura Drogowski said. “Police and EMS are the last safety net - with this training, we work to help officers understand that treating people with dignity, respect, and support can change their experiences.”