

**“Perceptions of Naloxone Use  
in a Rural Northern Appalachian Community”**

**Mark Berezansky  
Executive Director  
IUP Research Institute  
1179 Grant Street  
Indiana, PA 15701**

**Project Dates: January 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019**

**Submitted: May 15, 2018**

**Dr. Abigail Adams  
Assistant Professor of Anthropology  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
G1J McElhaney Hall  
441 North Walk  
Indiana, PA 15705  
724-357-3935  
[aadams@iup.edu](mailto:aadams@iup.edu)**

## **PROJECT FOCUS**

Students from two classes at Indiana University of Pennsylvania will collaborate with the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission (AICDAC) to study attitudes towards the use of Narcan in the opioid epidemic by interviewing first responders (i.e., law enforcement, fire fighters, EMTs), in-patient and out-patient treatment staff, medical providers, and policy makers in our community.

## **PROJECT DETAILS**

ANTH 240: 001 Introduction to Global Health, Fall 2018

Instructor: Dr. Abigail Adams, Assistant Professor of Anthropology

### **Community Partner: AICDAC**

Established in 1973, the Armstrong-Indiana Drug & Alcohol Commission has served as the designated Single County Authority (SCA) for drug and alcohol services and interventions in Armstrong and Indiana counties of Western Pennsylvania. In 2010, Clarion County was added to the Commission's operation. The AICDAC is responsible for assessing needs, planning, developing, and coordinating programming to meet the drug and alcohol service needs of the residents of these three counties. The AICDAC endeavors to monitor and evaluate the outcome of their drug and alcohol interventions. In this capacity, the AICDAC is an ideal partner for this project. The vision of the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission is to "maximize resources that empower change to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and the community impacted by the abuse and destructive effects of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs."<sup>1</sup>

### **Need**

In January 2018, Pennsylvania's Governor Wolf declared the heroin and opioid epidemic a statewide disaster emergency. The declaration was the first-of-its-kind for a public health emergency in Pennsylvania and it reflects the gravity of the opioid crisis in our state. Like many Appalachian communities, Indiana County has been struggling with opioid addiction as people from all lifestyles perish from overdoses at a rate that can only be understood as a public health catastrophe. The opioid epidemic is a serious challenge that impacts our county's long-term sustainability and overall health as enormous financial resources are required to address this widespread and devastating epidemic. In 2016, Indiana County's drug overdose death rate was 50.6 deaths per 100,000, compared to the larger state average of 36.5 deaths per 100,000. Autopsy and toxicology costs in Indiana County have nearly doubled in six years, from about \$89,000 in 2010 to \$165,000 in 2016. Additionally, Indiana County's primary ambulance provider, Citizens' Ambulance Service, has lost more than \$100,000 since

---

<sup>1</sup> More information on the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission can be found at <http://aidac.org/>.

2016 alone on opioid calls, according to Randy Thomas, director of operations.<sup>2</sup> The pervasiveness of opioid addiction negatively impacts the overall wellbeing of our county. Working with the AICDAC, students from the Introduction to Global Health will research the use of Narcan as an emergency intervention for overdose and how the use of the drug was implemented in Indiana County and the perceived impacts of this implementation by first-responders, the police, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the community. The end goal is to create an informed list of recommendations that can be adopted by other communities to aid in the reduction of opioid overdoses.

### **Overview of the project**

This project is a multi-method approach that will engage both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the landscape of the opioid epidemic in Indiana County. Students from Dr. Adams' *Introduction to Global Health Class (ANTH 240)*, with advisement from Dr. Amanda Poole, a specialist in ethnographic research, will utilize the anthropological methods of ethnographic interviews and participant observation to understand the nature of the opioid epidemic in our county and the perceptions and practices around the use of Narcan, also known as Naloxone. Narcan is an opioid disruptor which, when injected intravenously, subcutaneously, or administered by nasal spray reverses the effects of opioid drugs within minutes. It can save people from death by opioid overdose by reversing the depression of the central nervous system and respiratory system.<sup>3</sup> Early in the semester, students from the Introduction to Global Health Course will engage readings that help them develop a scholarly foundation in their analysis of the opioid epidemic on both the national and regional level. Students in the Global Health course will work with Dr. Adams to submit a research protocol review to the Human Subjects Review Board at IUP to ensure that the instrument we have designed (i.e., the questions we ask participants) are appropriate and ethically informed. With the assistance of our community partner, the AICDAC, students will conduct and record semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with individuals in the community who are knowledgeable about Narcan use in Indiana County. Using expert sampling, these individuals will be identified and recruited with the assistance of our community partner, the AICDAC.

Individuals will be selected for participation in the Naloxone study based on their experience as either first responders (i.e., EMTs), as members of the medical community in Indiana County working to counter the opioid epidemic (i.e., E.R. Docs), or as social workers in rehabilitation settings. Dr. Poole and Dr. Adams will work through our community partner, the AICDAC, to assist student researchers in identifying these individual stakeholders in our community who are engaging the opioid epidemic and can reflect on Narcan use from a practical perspective. Using the standard methods of ethnographic research, including face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, student

---

<sup>2</sup> Seligson, Paula and Tim Reid. (27 September 2017) "Unbudgeted: How the Opioid Crisis is Blowing a Hole in Small Town Americans Finances." Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-opioids-budgets/unbudgeted-how-the-opioid-crisis-is-blowing-a-hole-in-small-town-americas-finances-idUSKCN1BU2LP>, accessed 4/20/2018.

<sup>3</sup> Davey, Melissa (29 January 2016). "Selling opioid overdose antidote Naloxone over counter 'will save lives'." The Guardian. Archived from the original on 3 December 2016.

researchers will work closely with their faculty mentors (Adams and Poole) to identify appropriate participants. A proposal drawn from this project description will be submitted to Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Human Subject Review Board for IRB approval and all recruitment will follow approved informed consent procedures.

Using data from the CDC, University of Pittsburgh, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, students from Dr. Vick's *Health Economics (ECON 360)* course will write a report to set the context for the qualitative study conducted by Dr. Adams' students. First, the students will research background information and statistics on the opioid epidemic in Indiana and surrounding counties, the use and availability of Naloxone, and the prevalence of treatment centers. Second, the students will perform a review of the academic literature on the efficacy, costs, and benefits of naloxone treatments. Third, the students will perform a descriptive analysis of available county and state data and present information opioid deaths, drug-related arrests, hospitalization, and various demographic factors.

The data collected will be compiled by students from the Global Health Course to make policy recommendations which will be presented to our community partner in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. Additionally, a pamphlet will be created as a resource for people engaged in the fight against opioids that includes our policy recommendations as well as a list of the various resources available for providers, social workers, and community members.

#### **Number and description of planned meetings with the community partner**

- Dr. Adams, Dr. Vick and students from their classes will meet with our community partner, the AICDAC, early in the Fall 2018 semester. Students will have the opportunity to ask the management staff at the Commission questions about their services and experiences. The date of this meeting is to be determined.
- Dr. Adams and students from her class will meet with staff from the Drug Free Communities Coalition of Indiana County, a partner of the AICDAC. The date of this meeting is to be determined.
- Dr. Adams and students from her class will meet with the staff from the Overdose Task Force in Indiana County, also a partner of the AICDAC. The date of this meeting is to be determined.
- Members of Dr. Adams' class will all participate in a Narcan training by the AICDAC to better understand the nature of the drug and its clinical application. The date of this training is to be determined.
- Students will meet with the community partner to present the results of their project. Additionally, a pamphlet will be presented to the community partner and used for public dissemination of the project's findings.

#### **Goals/Objectives**

- Students from ANTH 240 and Econ 360 will work with the AICDAC to create a concrete list of data informed recommendations for the implementation of Narcan programming in Northern Appalachian communities.

- Students will increase their experience and knowledge of research methods related to qualitative and quantitative data by engaging the opioid epidemic of Northern Appalachia through collaborative and individual research. Students will interview community members who have experience around the use of Narcan and the opioid epidemic. Under faculty supervision, students will conduct qualitative research on the opioid epidemic in Indiana County.
- Students will engage as active, informed, and empowered learners and leaders, helping to publicize and present their findings to local program providers, such as the Overdose Task Force in Indiana County and other major stakeholders.
- Students will work with our community partner, draw from publicly available data sources, and actively seek out other community members and organizations to collect data on and create policy recommendations on the opioid epidemic.
- Students will communicate their findings through written, online, and oral presentation to members of the AICDAC and other local leaders and organizations.
- Students will present on their final product at the ATP meeting in Washington.
- Students will also present a poster at additional conferences that may include the Appalachian Studies Association annual conference in 2018, and/or at local conferences including the IUP Undergraduate Scholars forum.

## **PROJECT IMPACT**

This research project falls well in line with the ARC mission and with Strategic Investment Goal Two, which is to promote a “ready workforce” by improve the “education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.” Rural communities like Indiana have been especially hard-hit by this epidemic, particularly through the loss of life and work productivity of our youth, the future citizens of our community.

We intend this project to a) create broader linkages between the IUP community and Indiana County efforts to address the opioid epidemic; b) establish data informed, concrete recommendations around Narcan use in rural Appalachian communities; and c) add to the resources that are helping our community partner, AICDAC, address the opioid epidemic in our community.

We envision that the following community changes will occur as a result of this project:

- Development of shared objectives and scholarly linkages between the Indiana Community and IUP students and faculty. This project will cultivate the intellectual and civic development of students engaged as they delve into various factors that influence the opioid epidemic in our Appalachian community including poverty, low educational attainment, and isolation.
- Create potentially lasting partnerships between campus and community groups and service providers.
- Build community through fostering a sense of pride and belonging in the local town on behalf of IUP students. Create a sense that they are involved in local problems and can play a role in local solutions.

- Contribute to enhancing community assets in Indiana — student research can help local organizations build on existing initiatives and expand efforts to promote healthful living to local populations.
- Provide the opportunity for students to conduct community-based research, present on their work, and be exposed to work occurring in other areas of Appalachia.
- Engage at a community level the harmful effects of opioid addiction through social scientific research methods with the end-goal of better understanding of the use of Narcan, the ideologies that surround its use, and the development of an interdisciplinary implementation model that can be adopted and implemented by other Appalachian communities.