

October 12, 2018

Tisha Wiley, Ph.D  
Acting Deputy Branch Chief  
National Institute on Drug Abuse  
6001 Executive Boulevard  
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Re: Notice of Intent to Publish a Funding Opportunity Announcement for HEAL  
Justice Community Opioid Innovation Network Coordination and Translation Center

Dear Ms. Wiley:

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) — a national, nonprofit membership association with a well-founded reputation as both innovator and resource in the non-emergency and rural public transportation space — can be an essential partner and resource to the National Institutes of Health and its grantees through grant opportunity NOT-DA-18-035.

Though transportation will not be the primary focus of the grant, it will be a vital ancillary component of successful studies, pilots, etc., that become of the grant. Any opioid treatment, program, or service that gets created will not be effective without incorporating community transportation into the solution, because no matter how great the service, its quality is irrelevant without the means to reach it.

The hardest-hit populations in the opioid crisis largely reside in rural and small urban areas. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rural Americans are more vulnerable to prescription painkiller abuse and overdoses. The effects of the opioid epidemic are more intense in these communities due to the fact that employment opportunities are scarce, isolation is pervasive, and access to treatment and other supportive services is limited. In recent years, opioid mortality rates in rural areas have continued to increase, surpassing rates in urban areas as of 2015<sup>1</sup>.

Individuals in rural communities face longer travel distances to reach treatment centers, health care services, and other recovery and treatment services that may be critical pieces of their recovery and transition from the justice system. Furthermore, these groups tend to be low income, lack access to personal vehicles, and may not even have a valid driver's license even if a private vehicle was made available. As a result, without community-based public transit and other entities providing rides, they will not be able to reach essential health care and social services. The nation's more than 1,400 rural public transit agencies can assist, evidenced by a 7.8 percent increase in rural transit ridership in the past decade.

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Mack KA, Jones CM, Ballesteros, MF. 2017. *Illicit Drug Use and Drug Overdose in Metropolitan and Non-metropolitan areas — United States. MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.* 66:1- 12. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/ss/ss6619a1.htm>



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## Transit For All

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CTAA, with more than 30 years' of proven expertise in rural and small city mobility, can fill this gap. Researchers will need to understand the transportation network that justice-involved individuals can use to access treatment, appointments, and services, as well as what changes to this network would improve access, and therefore improve outcomes. The areas that CTAA members serve represent a significant portion of the most heavily affected populations, where transit managers and drivers have first-hand experience with many of the patients traveling across isolated areas to seek treatment, assistance, and support.

Access to many of these communities requires networking with the organizations that already work in them. CTAA can engage our members to connect researchers with local community leaders, as well as integrate their transportation systems into the researchers' evaluations. In addition, as experts in rural transit technical assistance and developing human-centered solutions, CTAA can serve as a resource for researchers to develop their programs through this grant.

Transportation is a significant contributor to success or failure in patient outcomes – a key social determinant of health – and such factors are especially relevant where substance use disorder and opioid misuse has become a public health crisis. CTAA has the network, experience, and skills to support researchers' work in addressing the opioid crisis. As an organization, CTAA is fully invested in contributing to positive outcomes wherever possible for communities around the country, and the organization would be particularly honored to assist in any efforts to overcome this public health crisis.

We appreciate your consideration of this letter. For more information about CTAA or to discuss this topic further, please contact me via email at [bogren@ctaa.org](mailto:bogren@ctaa.org) or at (202) 247-1921.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott Bogren". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Scott Bogren  
Executive Director  
Community Transportation Association of America