

NEW REPORT FROM GRANTMAKERS IN AGING EXPLORES IMPACT OF THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC ON RURAL AGING

“Heartache, Pain, and Hope: Rural Communities, Older People, and the Opioid Crisis: An Introduction for Funders” examines who is affected, how we got here, and what’s working

Washington, DC – (August 24, 2017) -- The opioid crisis is a story of many types of pain, and how individuals, families, and entire communities – particularly small and rural ones – are becoming collateral damage. A new paper released today by [Grantmakers In Aging](#) -- [*Heartache, Pain, and Hope: Rural Communities, Older People, and the Opioid Crisis: An Introduction for Funders*](#) -- looks at the problem with a fresh perspective, focusing overdue attention on the damage to rural communities, particularly the lives of older people, and describing proven programs, innovative partnerships, policy recommendations, and scientific and medical responses that governments, communities, nonprofits, and philanthropies can support and expand.

Download the full paper [here](#).

Rural communities tend to be tight-knit and self-reliant, but their infrastructure and resources are often limited, their populations are older than the rest of the country, and they are frequently overlooked in national policymaking. This has been a dangerous mix when it comes to opioids. According to the [CDC](#), for example, people in rural counties are nearly twice as likely to overdose on prescription painkillers as people in cities, and the wider impact is enormous as well.

"Community-wide aftershocks" of the opioid epidemic

“This crisis has caused community-wide aftershocks -- in child welfare, elder abuse, public safety, criminal justice, the workforce, the economy, caregiving, housing, and, of course, health care, and many older people are suffering as a result, often without care, attention, or support,” says John Feather, PhD, CEO of [Grantmakers In Aging](#) (GIA). “Some older people do suffer from opioid misuse and addiction problems, but the fallout reaches well beyond the addicted individuals, and the response from foundations and service providers must be broader as well, to address that wider set of needs.”

Putting the needs of older people on the opioid agenda

Some issues of particular concern to older people include:

- High rates of chronic pain, which is sometimes treated with opioids. This must be considered when making changes to the regulation and prescribing of opioids, and more alternative treatment options are needed.
- Cultural and generational sensitivities that may stop older people from seeking help when they do have a dependency. Reducing stigma and improving access to specialized help in rural communities are key objectives.
- Increased risk of elder abuse, and the need for stronger prevention and intervention options.
- Recognition and support for older people who take on additional responsibilities, such as raising grandchildren whose parents cannot care for them.

Rural communities bring certain unique strengths to this challenge, such as cohesive, supportive kinship and community networks and flexible, innovative local institutions. By understanding both the needs and the potential of rural communities, funders of all kinds can form better funding relationships and achieve greater impact on this sweeping national problem.

“Tivity Health has made a commitment to help address complex issues related to rural aging, and the impact of the opioid epidemic on rural seniors is truly catastrophic,” said Donato Tramuto, CEO of Tivity Health. “I know that rural communities have strengths that those outside the community may not recognize, and many are dealing with these issues with compassion, hard work and through innovative programs. I commend Grantmakers In Aging for bringing increased focus to this important issue with such a timely and provocative publication.”

Creating a network for rural aging

[*Heartache, Pain, and Hope: Rural Communities, Older People, and the Opioid Crisis: An Introduction for Funders*](#) is made possible by funding from Tivity Health and Empire Health Foundation and is the second paper GIA has published as part of its rural aging initiative. The first was [*New Frontiers for Funding: An Introduction to Grantmaking in Rural Aging*](#). GIA’s rural aging initiative, titled Creating a Sustainable Network for the Rural Aging Movement, is supported by Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, and seeks to increase the awareness and involvement of a wide range of philanthropies, nonprofits, government agencies, and communities.

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About Creating a Sustainable Network for the Rural Aging Movement

To accelerate and expand an emerging drive to improve the experience of rural aging, GIA is leading a three-year program, Creating a Sustainable Network for the Rural Aging Movement. GIA’s work on the opioid epidemic, including this report, is part of this initiative. The initiative seeks to connect and support key players concerned with rural aging, share knowledge, expand the resources and services available to older adults in rural areas, and is supported by a grant from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies. For more information, please visit GIAging.org/rural-aging.

About Grantmakers In Aging

Grantmakers In Aging (GIA) is an inclusive and responsive membership organization comprised of all types of philanthropies with a common dedication to improving the experience of aging. GIA members have a shared recognition that a society that is better for older adults is better for people of all ages. For more information, please visit GIAging.org.

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