



For Immediate Release

PHILANTHROPIES AND FEDERAL AGENCIES MEET IN WASHINGTON, DC TO SEEK BETTER COORDINATED RESPONSES TO OPIOID MISUSE EPIDEMIC IN RURAL AMERICA

Unique gathering co-hosted by Grantmakers In Aging and USDA showcased examples of success and cooperation, identified gaps in awareness and funding

Washington, DC – (December 19, 2018) -- To support more collaborative responses to the ongoing opioid epidemic and the widespread collateral damage to families and communities in rural America, Grantmakers In Aging (GIA) joined forces with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to host a special forum for foundations and government agencies on December 5, 2018 in Washington, DC. The meeting's goal was to give funders and federal agency staff the opportunity to understand each other's priorities and funding opportunities, identify resource gaps, and improve collaborative approaches to help small and rural communities in crisis.

"At USDA, our core mission is to increase rural prosperity. We know the opioid crisis is affecting people's economic future and quality of life in small towns and rural places across this country," said Anne Hazlett, Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in her welcome remarks. "This convening is an exciting opportunity to bring the foundation and federal families together to explore how we can build the new partnerships that are critical to the future."

Examples of successful collaboration provide opportunities for replication

Presenters included leaders from several federal agencies and from foundations that have forged successful partnerships with agencies in Region V of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which includes Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Ellen Quigley, Vice President of Programs at the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, described a regional working group that meets quarterly and includes private, hospital, corporate, and community foundations, Chambers of Commerce, and representatives of state and federal government including staff and members of Congress. "We were hearing the same thing in every sector: this opioid epidemic was like a tsunami, and no one knew how to handle it," she said.

"The opioid epidemic is creating community-wide aftershocks and harming a wide circle of people of all ages who are not addicted -- children, parents, grandparents," said John Feather, CEO of Grantmakers In Aging, an affinity group of all types of philanthropies with a commitment to improving the experience of aging and the co-host of the event. "At the same time, American communities are getting older, and one in four older Americans lives in a small town or other rural community. We want to help philanthropy be as motivated, effective and targeted as possible in its efforts to address this problem."

There was also widespread agreement about the need for a multi-faceted approach. USDA's Anne Hazlett cited the government's support for services ranging from transportation to foster care to high-speed broadband. "We would like you to know that we have programs that can really help address many of the deeper systemic issues that make rural communities more vulnerable to addiction," she said.

Federal perspectives came from representatives of the Federal Transit Administration Office of Program Management--Rural and Targeted Programs, the USDA state director for New Hampshire and Vermont, USDA's Rural Development, and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Assistance. For example, DOJ's Senior Drug Policy Officer Tara Kunkel described funding to prepare first responders to direct at-risk individuals to drug courts and diversion and treatment programs instead of jail.

Another often-heard theme was the need for philanthropy to direct grants to services the federal government does not or cannot fund. As Mary Pounder, Program Director at the Comer Family

Foundation described, this includes support for distribution of syringes to prevent opioid overdose, HIV and hepatitis C transmission, as well as mail-order syringe access and distribution of the antidote Naloxone for rural communities.

New data resources

A number of important resources available to local governments, philanthropies, and researchers were also presented, including:

- **USDA's Rural Resource Guide to Help Communities Address Substance Use Disorder and Opioid Misuse**, a first-of-its-kind, one-stop-shop listing of all available Federal programs, funding, and partnership opportunities to address opioid misuse in rural communities. Download it at www.rd.usda.gov/files/RuralResourceGuide.pdf
- Alana Knudson, Co-Director of the Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis, demonstrated the interactive **USDA-NORC Community Assessment Tool**, which combines state- and county-specific substance misuse data with socioeconomic, census and other public information. Access it on USDA's Rural Opioid Misuse webpage (www.usda.gov/topics/opioids) or at opioidmisusetool.norc.org.
- ***Heartache, Pain, and Hope: Rural Communities, Older People, and the Opioid Crisis: An Introduction for Funders***, a report from Grantmakers In Aging, focuses on the damage to rural communities, particularly the lives of older people, and describes proven programs, innovative partnerships, and policy recommendations. Download it at bit.ly/GIA_opioid.

All available presenter resources from the event can be found at: bit.ly/GIA-USDA-Forum.

Consensus: More learning, coordination are essential

The convening ended with small-group breakout sessions focused on identifying actionable next steps. A clear consensus emerged: whether it is additional reporting on available funding sources, webinars and conference calls to present successful partnerships, coaching and technical assistance on grantwriting and navigating the federal system, or regional meetings to nurture connections between philanthropy and the federal government, there is much more to be done. Commitment, creativity, and coordination between government, funders, nonprofits, and communities will be needed if we are to make meaningful progress toward meeting the needs, and indeed, saving the lives, of individuals and communities in pain.

#####

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.

About the United States Department of Agriculture For more information, please visit www.usda.gov/topics/opioids.

Media Contact:

Elliott Walker for Grantmakers In Aging
ewalker@aboutscp.com