



Naloxone Stand Boxes: Alameda County Health Partners With Community to Distribute Life-Saving Resource

By AC Health Communications Team

ALAMEDA COUNTY, CA - On December 18, April Rovero marked the 15th anniversary of her son Joey's death from an accidental prescription drug overdose while a student at Arizona State University. Looking back and reflecting, Rovero is more resolute than ever that her son would be alive today if things were just a little different.

"I am certain that my son would have been saved had naloxone been on hand and people knew how to use it," said Rovero. "There's no doubt in my mind that if someone was able to neutralize the opioids, he would have been fine."

Following her son's tragic death, Rovero went on to establish the [National Coalition Against Prescription Drug Abuse](#) (NCAPDA). Now her organization is partnering with Alameda County Health on an innovative initiative to install Naloxone Stand Boxes (NSBs) in public sites throughout the East Bay.

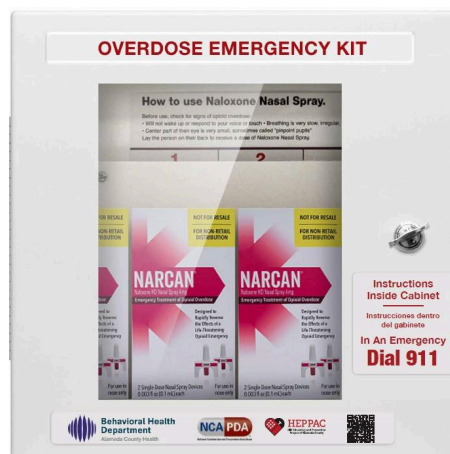


Image Credit: AC Health Overdose and Poisoning Prevention Program

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse the effects of opioid poisoning such as slowed or stopped breathing. When administered promptly, naloxone restores normal breathing and can be a lifesaving intervention. The nasal spray formulation, which will be provided in the NSBs, is easy to use and does not require medical training. The NSBs look like newspaper stands but contain naloxone that anyone can take for free, along with information on how to use it and about treatment and other resources.

Braunz Courtney, the Executive Director of the [HIV Education and Prevention Project of Alameda County](#) (HEPPAC), said the nasal spray form of the naloxone has eradicated barriers to care for individuals suffering from opioid overdoses. With HEPPAC being a pioneering organization in harm reduction, Courtney has witnessed the evolution of treatments for overdoses, from when naloxone was only available as an injectable solution.

“The landscape definitely changed when the nasal spray became more easily available,” said Courtney, whose organization is also partnering with Alameda County Behavioral Health Department on the NSB program. “Before, you had to draw up the naloxone by needle and syringe and inject it into specific areas of the body, which is a very severe process for a lot of people helping respond to identifying an opioid overdose. Now, we’ve really normalized the situation to where people feel empowered to help others. We are very grateful for our public partners in Alameda County for helping to create that environment.”

Courtney said that along with increasing access to life-saving interventions, the NSBs work to erase the stigma that goes along with opioid addiction. That sentiment is echoed by Dr. Arnie Spanjers with the Alameda County Health’s Overdose and Poisoning Prevention Program, who is helping oversee the NSB program.

“The science is very clear about this — Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) (previously referred to as addiction) is not a moral failure, but it’s a disease,” said Spanjers. “I think doctors are getting a better handle on this now — that this is a chronic disease that needs treatment.”

As part of the NSB program, Alameda County is currently accepting applications from organizations interested in hosting an NSB. Possible sites include hospitals, libraries, schools, transit systems, and businesses. Entities interested in requesting a NSB — which are installed and distributed free of charge — can fill out the application [here](#).

“We are honored to collaborate with our nonprofit partners on this very important program,” said Dr. Joshua Kayman, Chief of Addiction Care Services at the Alameda County Behavioral Health Department. “We encourage all interested organizations to apply for an NSB—we know that access to naloxone can save lives.”

Opioid poisoning or overdose is a leading cause of preventable death in Alameda County. By increasing public access to naloxone through the NSBs, the County and its partners are working to reduce those numbers. They’re also working to correct the misperception that the NSBs could somehow encourage opioid use — a falsehood that’s been proven wrong by numerous medical studies.

“This is just about creating access and providing another tool to keep people alive,” said Courtney.

With organizations like HEPPAC, NCAPDA and the [Contra Costa County MEDS Coalition](#) helping Alameda County to raise awareness about the NSBs, there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the program. Renee Yun, Program Manager with Alameda County Health’s Overdose and Poisoning Prevention Program, credited community activists with setting the blueprint early on for this kind of initiative.

“I think it’s really important to acknowledge that harm reduction advocates were providing these services a long time ago, in an underground setting, when the general public was

much less accepting about this approach,” said Yun. “We’ve come such a long way since the first pilot project. Naloxone is available over the counter now. We are putting out unmonitored naloxone distribution boxes, available to anyone who wants to use them, 24/7. We lost a lot of lives when these resources were not readily available to people who needed them. And now we have the opportunity to save lives and give people another chance.”

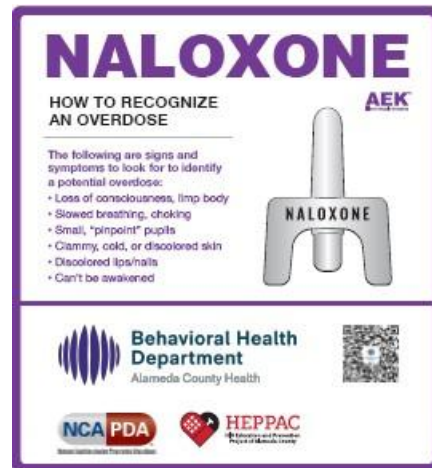


Image Credit: AC Health Overdose and Poisoning Prevention Program

The pilot project referenced by Yun was a joint effort between HEPPAC and [CA Bridge](#) that was funded by a mini grant from the [California Harm Reduction Initiative](#) (CHRI). Created as a way to implement innovative harm reduction services in an effort to reduce overdoses, that pilot led to the creation of NSBs.

“We know that opioid overdoses can affect people from all walks of life,” said Rovero. “My son died from drugs he was prescribed by a doctor. There is a huge impact zone of people affected by these deaths — their friends, their family. But as long as that person is alive, there is a chance they’ll get the treatment they need. These NSBs help create that possibility — they help keep that person alive.”

Learn more about Alameda County Health at [Health.AlamedaCountyCA.gov](https://www.alamedahealth.org).

###