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### Wayne State social work, pharmacology experts to evaluate Michigan's [Return to News List](#) federally funded response to opioid crisis

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Substance misuse experts from Wayne State's School of Social Work, [Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Family and Child Development](#), and [School of Medicine](#) (SOM) have been contracted to evaluate a multimillion-dollar, statewide initiative to treat and prevent opioid misuse.

Michigan's opioid initiative will be funded by a \$16.37 million award given to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) through the State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis Grant, which is administered by the federal government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. MDHHS will give Social Work and SOM nearly \$600,000 over two years to evaluate the activities and outcomes of the state's targeted response. The evaluation will be conducted by [Elizabeth Agius](#), manager of community partnerships for Social Work, Associate Social Work Professor [Stella Resko](#), Assistant Social Work Professors [Suzanne Brown](#) and [Jamie Lister](#), and [Eugene Schoener](#), professor of pharmacology at SOM.

According to the Office of Governor Rick Snyder, from 1999 to 2014 Michigan saw a four-fold increase in unintentional fatal drug poisonings, and in 2012 was ranked tenth in the nation per capita for prescribing rates of opioid pain relievers. Among other things, Michigan's Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis grant will involve expanding access to overdose-reversing medications, improving the Michigan Automated Prescription System, training healthcare professionals, developing a statewide awareness campaign, increasing peer supports, tribal supports and support of law enforcement, and expanding the use of motivational interviewing and medication-assisted treatment among publicly funded providers.

The evaluators at Wayne State will assess the reach and efficacy of these and other program components and will assist with a needs assessment involving extensive interviews with families, law enforcement, health care providers, treatment agencies, and others impacted by the opioid crisis.

[Doug Skrzyniarz](#), Wayne State's associate vice president of government health affairs, said Wayne State's key role in the state's targeted opioid response demonstrates the university's "commitment to working with state and local leaders on the opioid crisis." He noted that Wayne State recently formed a university-wide task force to identify ways to enhance its curriculum for health professional students.

"We are a resource for the entire community," Skrzyniarz said.

Agius brings extensive program evaluation experience to the project as well as a close relationship with MDHHS's Office of Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care, with whom she has collaborated on evaluation work for the past eight years. Resko, who has a joint appointment with Merrill Palmer, is coordinator of Social Work's interdisciplinary graduate [Certificate in Alcohol and Drug Abuse Studies](#) (CADAS) and has conducted extensive research on substance misuse and its impact on families.

Brown brings to the team a strong research and clinical background in substance misuse treatment among mothers, and Lister is an adjunct assistant professor in the School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences Substance Abuse Research Division. Schoener brings to the team research expertise in pharmacology and substance use treatment, including medication-assisted treatment.

According to Agius, Social Work is "uniquely positioned to lead the evaluation because of our field's commitment to evidence-based prevention and treatment services for substance misuse. Our faculty and students are at the forefront of clinical treatment for opioid addiction."

Calling the scope and impact of the opioid crisis "staggering," Resko said Michigan's targeted response includes critical enhancements shown to be effective in addressing opioid misuse, overdose and death.

“We need to improve access to treatment and recovery services, expand the availability of overdose-reversing drugs, and support public health surveillance and research in Michigan,” Resko said. “By evaluating the work of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and working with service providers throughout the state, we are hoping to improve the safety and well-being of individuals, families and communities in Michigan.”

For additional information on research conducted at the Wayne State University School of Social Work visit the [Center for Social Work Research](#) website.

The School of Social Work | [\(313\) 577-4409](#) | 5447 Woodward Avenue Detroit, Michigan 48202 [Directions](#)

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