Murlean Tucker: Welcome to Meet the Partner Saving Lives with Faith-Based Leaders. My name is Murlean Tucker. I’ll be running this Dialogue4Health Web Forum. Thank you to our partner for today’s event, the National Overdose Prevention Network. As you can see, our speakers have activated their videos today. So, locate the circle in the right corner of the large center screen for options to rearrange your video. You will find maximum flexibility with the floating panel view. Audio is through your computer speakers or headphones. Click the computer panel at the bottom of the screen for additional ways to connect. We encourage you to share your thoughts and your questions about today’s presentation by typing them into the Q and A box and we will answer as many of them as we can. So you want to open the Q and A panel by clicking the Black circle with the three white dots at the bottom of your screen and then in the Q and A panel on the right side of your screen, select all panelists from the dropdown menu so that your question gets sent to the right place. Today, realtime captioning is provided by Sally, of Home Team Captions. To access captions, click the multimedia viewer icon located under the circle with three dots at the bottom of your screen. Next on the right side of your Jeanne screen, locate the link in the captioning panel that says show/hide header. If it ever disappears click the multimedia viewer icon to bring it back. Now it’s time to meet the moderator of today’s event. Dr. Carmen Rita Nevarez. Dr. Nevarez is the director of the California Opioid Safety
Network and National Overdose Prevention Network. She's the public health institute's Vice President of external relations and preventive medicine, director of the center for health leadership and practice, and director of Dialogue4Health. A long-standing voice for the public's health, Carmen is responsible for developing relationships with health and public-health organizations and interests, advocating for public health and incubating new programs. Welcome again, Carmen.

>> Carmen Nevarez: Good morning, everybody. Thank you, Murlean. Really appreciate that introduction. I am really excited about today's conversation because it's going to give us a chance to explore an area that we don't often talk about, but we really need to, to look at a little bit more closely with respect to our relationships within our community. So, faith-based communities can be a lifeline. For so many. But sometimes they get overlooked as a resource for families, for friends, and for a person who is in recovery or who is currently using, we want to explore this topic today and just spend a little time thinking about how to expand the potential already in our communities that perhaps we haven't touched yet. Next slide, please. Why don't we start with a poll. Do you partner with faith-based leaders or communities? So your choices are yes, I currently partner with faith-based leaders. No, I don't have a partnership in place with faith-based leaders, or, I am a faith-based leader. So use your mouse and let's get your answer to this and we will leave the poll open for about 30 seconds. And then we will look at the results before we go on.

>> Murlean Tucker: So we have a few more seconds for the poll. Just remember to hit the submit button to get your responses to be calculated. Ok. I'm just about to close that poll. And the poll is closing, in just about 10 seconds. So quickly hit submit. Ok. Going to go ahead and hit the results.

>> Let's look at results now.

>> Murlean Tucker: Ok. Results are in.

>> Carmen Nevarez: Can you show that slide? Oh, there we go. It's on the side. The very good. So we have a few faith-based leaders with us today and it looks like we are a little split, a little bit more with people who already have a relationship, hopefully this conversation will give us a chance to explore some new areas and for those we don't, this might give us a chance to think a little bit about ways to truly engage across a number of sectors that are already organized and serving our communities. So let's go to the next slide, please.

So the National Overdose Prevention Network is here helping you
to save lives and we are about partnerships. We really are about strategies and we are about resources. We are going to spend time today talking about what some of those strategies are, build stronger partnerships, and we know that in partnership with many others across our communities, we have the potential to prevent overdoses and overdose deaths. Next slide, please.

In the National Overdose Prevention Network, we think a lot about who are all those other folks that bring their assets to the table once we invite them to really, truly partner with us. We know that there are folks that we may not usually think about and today our conversation is about faith. But there are times when we don't think about folks such as first responders or payors or pharmacies or the criminal justice system, there perhaps is a community policing person that you know who would be a very good partner who you haven't thought of yet to have a relationship with. So today, let's do a little bit of a dive and look at, dive into the area of working with faith-based communities and see what we can uncover here. Next slide.

We use a model at the National Overdose Prevention Network. Our model is about two things. Coalition building and having very strong groups of people that are committed and are organized to change systems and we bring into that various things that we know about overdose strategies and help people to figure out ways to bring those overdose strategies into their daily lives and make those strategies work. Nestled within an understanding of learning the skills of how to measure what you do and communicate about it and think about what you need to change in order to do better and also, how to keep going in the long run. What does it take to keep going in the long run? How do you keep focused? Your eyes on the prize, so to speak. Next slide, please.

We know that there are four basic evidence-based approaches to preventing overdoses. Prevent new addictions. Everyone has a role in that. Manage pain safely. There are two sides. What you get from your health care provider and also how you understand how to manage pain yourself. There's treating addiction. New treatments are available and we want to make sure that everybody knows all the treatments and how to access them. And absolutely fundamentally, we need to organize and understand ways of stopping overdose deaths. Next slide.
So, what is NOPN about? And how does NOPN benefit you? We teach, work, develop strategies, we look at best practices and share them and try to figure out ways to adapt those best practices to our own work. We look deeply to find new partners in our work. We think about policy change and how to move local, state, national policy in a way that benefits the communities to stop overdoses. And, we think about how do we stay in the game. How do we keep this move meant going and how do we move to the next level of achievement. Next slide.

So here we are. We are now at the point where we are going to get to the real meat of the matter. I am really pleased to ask David liners from WISDOM, state director in Wisconsin, to talk a little bit about himself, about what WISDOM is and about how he got engaged in this work. David?

David Liners: Well thank you very much for having me. So, WISDOM is a network in Wisconsin of mostly congregation-based organizations. So we have like where I am right now in Milwaukee, we have Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope, MICAH, we are fond of tortured acronyms. And we have about a dozen such groups around the state where most of our membership is religious congregations though we come from 20 different religious traditions. As a matter of fact we just added a new Buddhist the other day. What we do is work together to build community that kind of crosses over religious racial economic geographic lines. And then to come together as a values-based focus to advocate for sorts of policies that match up with our values. So in the broad sense, that's what we do. In WISDOM, particularly, we are by the way part of a national network called the Gamaliel Network which has organizations like us in 17 different states. In WISDOM, we kind of specialize in criminal justice reform things or we like to call it transformational justice. Essentially trying to reduce the use of criminal justice and policing as a solution to our problems and increase public health responses to the issues that we have and certainly addiction would be among them. How I got involved in this would be a really long story. Let's just say way back when, when I was a child, I used to be a Catholic priest so I was actually involved in community organizing efforts in Chicago many years ago. And since that time, when I decided not to do the priest thing anymore and I was looking for something I thought I could do, community organizing seemed like a good thing. So I have been at this, in this particular job, for 22 years at this point.
Carmen Nevarez: Well that's a teaser of a great story and I think we would probably like to know more. So, perhaps, you know, feel free to touch on the various parts that you think are relevant in this conversation. Talk a little bit about what you feel that it means to be a faith had been based leader.

David Liners: So I really feel like, and this would be typical of our membership, we are at a real crossroads. In the faith community these days. Are we going to — what are the values that we are really going to stand for, like as the world, as the world changes. So I think it's part of saying how do we get really to the root of what it is that our faith communities were founded for in the first place. To be compassionate, to really, to really stand for the folks who most need to be stood with to stand against as St. Paul would call it the powers and principalities when necessary, to really stand for different values. I think our faith traditions were all founded by revolutionaries who really wanted to overturn systems and I think that's what we are trying to be about many I think there's a real crossroads. It's congregations, faith communities in general tend to be a little troubled these days. Their membership is going down, their finances are less. And I think it's kind of a gut-check time. Like are we going to still stand for the principles? Or are we going to scramble to keep our doors open and keep the lights on? And our members have kind of chosen the former that we are going to stand for making some significant change. Having to do with everything from racial equity to equinomic equity to even the language that we use when we talk about each other.

Carmen Nevarez: Those are some good thoughts and I really appreciate what you are saying about thinking about the language that we use and the importance of that in thinking about how, where we are in many of our different cultures and our practice communities, how important that is. Particularly in this area of overdose prevention.

I wonder if you could speak to just a minute about the key challenges or pushback that faith-based leaders might experience when partnering with other stakeholders around overdose prevention.

David Liners: Sure. I think there's a few. Especially when it comes to issues having to do with addiction or anything that typically gets treated in, you know, in the criminal justice world is, there's kind of an expectation that we are going to be -- [audio breaking up] -- in the sense of chastising people for
bad choices and that sort of thing. And I think it's hard to kind of get past that, you know? Especially people who might be having an issue themselves. So see beyond seeing faith leaders as people who are just going to scold them, as opposed to being somebody who can be a real resource. And that actually ties to a much bigger issue of shame. Even within our congregations. The church I go to, I go to a little church, you know, it took us a while to kind of find out like half our church have people who have had in their families who have had really serious issues. With substance abuse and there's a bunch more people who have had issues with mental health and a lot of people who it's both. And very few people would talk about it. You know? We deal with it as kind of a personal isolated shame kind of a thing and I think one of the challenges for faith communities is to get people to say this is why we need to build community. The that we don't need to hide from each other. We need to see each other as assets. We need to see each other as resources. So I think part of it is the expectation that people have on faith communities and then when it comes to public policy, you know, there's a lot of political leaders especially if you want something that they are not fond of, you know, who want to kind of push faith communities back to no, no, no, you go take care of your people, you go pray for the rest of us, you shouldn't be getting your hands dirty in all this political stuff. I think a lot of it is the expectation and the other challenge these days is that faith communities themselves are really struggling to stay live and struggling to figure out what their -- [audio dropped]

>> Carmen Nevarez: Those are some really good points. Tell us the story that paints a picture of what partnering with faith-based communities can look like on the ground.

>> David Liners: One of the things that I think is real exciting in our work, we actually have a part of our organization, ex incarcerated people organizing. EXPO. It started with members of our member congregations who had, you know, had conviction histories, who had been incarcerated, and we sort of got them together and that's actually become like an organization within our organization. It's become actually pretty big. And pretty influential.

The partnership between EXPO and our congregations has been terrific. We've actually got people coming in to speak to congregations about their own experience and that's really kind of helped to free up people both to be better allies, better partners and like I said before, be able to sort of own that this isn't somebody else's problem. That none of us are more
than about two degrees of separation away from somebody who's got a serious issue. So that's been really helpful and then it's been real exciting like when we are able to see each other in person, when I go to Madison, it's fun to have a Christian pastor and an Imam and a couple EXPO members go together to see a legislator. Because they can certainly help to make a point in a lot of different ways and kind of keep some of that separation. So I think it's again that sort of bringing together faith communities have the ability to create circumstances where voices of impacted people can be centered, which is really key. I mean it's actually getting people so you aren't just -- you're not just preaching to the choir. That actually in faith communities you are actually able to reach people with kind of a variety of experiences and are able to reach people who might not live and breathe these issues every day, but you are able to introduce people and to kind of create some of those relationships. I think a story, one of the most fun ones we ever had, one of those little groups who went to visit a state Senator and the state Senator started going back and saying ahh I don't know why you want to invest all of this in drug treatment, I understand they all relapse anyhow, throw good money after bad. The religious leader who was with us, probably in his 70s, said Senator, I just want you to know I've had four open-heart surgeries. Are you telling me the first three were a waste of time? It was just kind of like this great moment that this guy didn't have an answer and really helped him to see things in a different way. So sometimes varieties of messengers being able to kind of bring a common message can be really helpful.

>> Carmen Nevarez: Good story. There are some questions from the audience, but let me ask you for one reflection for a moment. What's a good story that gives you hope?

>> David Liners: I'll be really up to the moment and it's hopeful just this morning, just before, before this had a long Zoom conversation with the secretary of corrections in our state and again a couple of faith leaders and a couple of EXPO members and myself and one of the things that they have done in Wisconsin, they just put out a memo about, on language. That they are no longer going to refer to the people in prison as prisoner, even prisoners, they directed everyone that they are to be referred to as the people in our care. That kind of gave me some hope that cultures can change. Of that we can actually change the way that people talk about each other and that some of our message, now we would like for some of the more substantive stuff would be good. Now stop putting people in
solitary confinement, that would be a next step. But I think if you start to change that consciousness. So that was really good. But then I have to tell you the funny thing. He proudly sent me a copy of the memo and the title of the memo said Using first-Person Language. I said before you send this out, it's person-first language. It's not first-person. But anyhow we appreciate the effort. So that was a hopeful moment just this morning.

> Carmen Nevarez: That's a good story. So let me go to an audience question. There is somebody here who is telling the story of being in Vancouver, Washington, which is a suburb of Portland, Oregon, where there's a large Russian speaking community. Working to build trust in the community but falling apart because the pandemic -- since so many people think it's a hoax. Any advice about how to work within that community?
> David Liners: Boy, not a lot. It's -- you know, this is, again, where leadership on every level, whether it's faith community leadership or political leadership, just needs to be responsible. Because yeah, sadly people are open to all kinds of whacky ideas and we just need to, yeah, we need to get better messengers, you know, to help people see that things, something like that the pandemic is certainly not a hoax and that the vaccine isn't going to brainwash us all and all of that other nonsense.

> Carmen Nevarez: Yes. New messengers. That could be a good thing. How much are you working with predominantly Black churches and congregations?
> David Liners: So, here in Milwaukee, as the name, you know inner city congregations, our organization is predominantly Black. So my boss is an African American. Outstate, in Wisconsin that's anything that's not Milwaukee or Madison, there are not that many people of color. There's more than you would think, they are certainly not seen very often, migrant workers at the dairy farm workers and that sort of thing. There's a larger community that most people don't realize but it's harder outstate to find faith communities that are predominantly Black, just because the numbers are such. But here in Milwaukee, we have quite a few. It's certainly not a majority. I mean it never has been. But we, you know, we have a couple dozen very strong African American congregations.

> Carmen Nevarez: And are you finding this an opportunity to address the issue of overdose prevention?
> David Liners: So yes, in a way. You know, we don't -- that's not the center of our mission. A big part of our mission that we have been at for years is, again, partly trying to deal with
stigma. That's a big thing. Your children won't be taken from you if you come for help. Trying to get those policy changes. Trying to get people to come forward, doing a whole lot of trying to get drug treatment courts set up, more other kinds of die version programs set up. Again, our lane, particularly, is trying to move people out of the criminal justice system and into the health system as a way of preventing. And then also just, my belief is that I am hopeful, I mean anything that builds community. Anything that builds connections between people I think is going to be helpful.

>> Carmen Nevarez: Well we certainly know there's a very strong, strong link between people who have lived experience and people who are recovering and the criminal justice system there, particularly for a person of color. That's a multiplier. So, it is important that there are ways to speak to engaging faith communities that help to build a culture at a local level around opportunity around using stigma around connecting with others. There's no question there's a real role there in the faith community.

I just want to ask one final question from our audience. Are you including people with lived experience in your activities?

>> David Liners: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah, we are very much part of, you know, the movement that, you know, the people closest to the problem are the people closest to the solution. I would say if you came to an average WISDOM meeting, half of everybody is in recovery. You know, probably two thirds of the EXPO members are people in recovery. So yeah, we are -- we kind of believe that if you don't have people with lived experience at the center, we probably shouldn't try and deal with it. You know. If we aren't really engaging the people who have the most experience. That's kind of a bedrock principle I think of organizing in general and certainly with our brand of organizing is kind of, nothing about us without us. You know. And we're not going to presume to speak for people who actually have much more experience than I do.

>> Carmen Nevarez: Well thank you. Let me thank you so much. Really from the, from my heart, for taking the time to talk with us today. It's just a start. There is so much more work to do and I know that we appreciate your participation in today's session. Is there a last slide I need to go to? Thank you. So, please let, we just want you all to know that are out there in the audience, contact us at NOPN if there's any other particular area that we can start a conversation with, we know
these are not as deep and as far reaching as they might be, but we can always renew them, we can bring them back, we can do more work, we could invite David back for another conversation so, give us your feedback. We are happy to hear it and I want to just ask all of you, be sure to check out the NOPN website and see if you can participate with us let us know what you want, what you need and what kind of conversation you would like to hear us start in the next series. So thank you very much, David. Thank you to the audience. And thank you to everyone who has helped to put this together. I just want to remind everybody, we are -- our upcoming webinar will be on addressing racial justice and overdose. Thank you to all and have a better week. Bye-bye.

>> David Liners: Thank you.