

CAN Community Health Partners with the IDEA Exchange

Making phone calls to secure a shelter bed, handing cold water to someone living on the street, taking an oral swab to test for HIV, escorting a newly diagnosed patient to Jackson Memorial Hospital – these are all part of a typical day for staff members at the University of Miami's two-year-old IDEA Exchange, Florida's first and only legislatively authorized syringe exchange.



Richard Carlisle of CAN Community Health, left, with David Forrest, Ph.D., program director, IDEA Exchange, and Hansel E. Tookes, M.D., MPH.

They are also some of the areas that CAN Community Health – a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the treatment, care and continual wellness of people living with HIV, hepatitis C, STDs and other diseases – is hoping to impact through a recent donation to the IDEA (Infectious Disease Elimination Act) Exchange. On Dec. 10, representatives from the Sarasota-based organization came to Miami to present

a check for \$200,000, money that will help meet the deeply complex needs of a vulnerable population.

“CAN Community Health is dedicated to providing health services, education and counseling to people in areas with high HIV prevalence,” said Richard E. Carlisle, CAN president and CEO. “New partnerships with organizations such as the IDEA Exchange are empowering us to deliver vital services in the communities where they are needed most, like Miami.”

CAN Community Health shares the same mission of the IDEA Exchange, which launched in 2016 to provide individuals battling addiction with access to the tools necessary for them to be healthy and free of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C.

“We are thrilled to have our work here at the IDEA Exchange, with some of the most vulnerable people in our community, supported by CAN Community Health,” said Hansel Tookes, M.D. '14, MPH, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine and the IDEA Exchange's founder and medical director.

Besides its primary function of providing new syringes in exchange for used ones, the IDEA Exchange hosts many auxiliary harm reduction services to reduce the spread of HIV, hepatitis C, and other blood-borne diseases. The IDEA Exchange also links people to health care, medication-assisted treatment, behavioral health services, and other resources.



From left, Hansel E. Tookes, M.D., MPH; Rishi Patel, PharmD, Katy Wendel, RN, and John Acevedo of CAN Community Health; Edward Suarez, Psy.D., LMHC, community engagement manager, IDEA Exchange; and Richard Carlisle of CAN Community Health.

“This generous gift will allow us to meet patients at risk for and living with HIV where they are, and help get them the vital care they need,” Tookes said. “The opioid epidemic has joined the HIV epidemic as one of the most important of our lifetime. We are proud to partner with CAN Community Health in our efforts to get to zero here in Miami.”

While a medical student at the Miller School, Tookes began a five-year lobbying campaign to get the Florida Legislature to approve the needle exchange. The IDEA Exchange is now a busy center on the edge of the medical campus.

“We desperately need this type of program in Miami,” said Carlisle, CAN president and CEO. “There is a stigma

surrounding needle exchange programs for people who are unfamiliar with this subject. There is ample research demonstrating that these harm reduction programs reduce the spread of blood-borne diseases. After spending time in the community with Dr. Tookes and his team, I saw the impact that these dedicated individuals are making.”

For more information, contact the IDEA Exchange at 786.606.9047 or ideaexchange@miami.edu.