The Kensington Initiative
The Violent Crime and Opioid Reduction Partnership

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What is the Kensington Initiative?

The Kensington Initiative (KI) is a collaborative place-based, law enforcement-driven strategy designed to reduce violent crime and overdose deaths in the Kensington-Fairhill area of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The initiative, which began in 2018, leverages law enforcement intelligence and smart prosecution to remove drug-trafficking enterprises with active outdoor drug markets, and follow-up with community-based efforts that improve the physical environment and alleviate incivilities (i.e., disorder) on the street block. Kensington-Fairhill has been referred to by some as the largest open-air heroin market on the East Coast of the United States. Led by the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General's (OAG) Bureau of Narcotics and Investigation (BNI) and Drug Strike Force Section, this multi-partner effort coordinates with the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD), the city of Philadelphia Managing Director's Office (MDO), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other federal and local agencies to achieve not only immediate reductions in violence, but also longer-term improvements in quality of life for community residents.

In 2019, the OAG was awarded a federal grant through the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to further develop the strategy and add a research partner to conduct a process and impact evaluation. The research team is also developing a system of performance tracking and reporting to provide feedback to the OAG around effective elements of the initiative. This project brief discusses the strategy and grant components, the KI focus area, and accomplishments to date.

The Strategy

The challenges created by the dual epidemics of opioid overdose deaths and gun violence, coupled with limited resources and the difficulties of policing in today's politically-charged environment, dictated the need for a holistic partnership strategy that used criminal intelligence information, administrative data and analyses to focus resources on crime drivers while also considering the needs of the community. The KI uses a three-pronged approach:

Highlight Job #3

The Kensington Initiative is a unique partnership between local, state, and federal law enforcement to target criminal drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). The investigations are known as jobs. Investigators typically take on one job at a time. Job 3 concluded in a large-scale enforcement operation[3] in July of 2019 after approximately six months of surveillance. To date, agents executed more than 20 search warrants on residences, warehouses, and vehicles believed to be connected to the DTO. They seized six kilos of heroin/fentanyl, two kilos of cocaine, six handguns, one rifle, multiple rounds of ammunition, $200,000 in cash, a kilo press, scales and packaging equipment, and charged more than 30 individuals. During the investigation, agents also prevented three shootings over the course of just a few weeks.

Some corners in Kensington exhibit more violence and drug crimes than others. The DTO targeted for Job 3 was prioritized for the KI because of its attendant violence and contribution to Kensington's drug markets. Looking at the 0.1 square miles surrounding their block (a roughly 2-block radius), there were eight shootings and roughly 500 drug crime incidents recorded by police in this small area in 2018 and 2019. In 2019 alone, 14 people died of accidental drug overdose in the same area. The ring had ties stretching as far as Allentown, PA to the north and Bucks County to the East. It is believed that the ringleaders of the DTO used children to sell their drugs on the street. The constellation of public safety problems emanating from this DTO made Job 3 a particular success for the KI.

1. Coordination of criminal intelligence investigations at three levels of government as a force multiplier.
2. Lead prosecution at the state level at the onset of investigations for effective prosecution, with coordination with federal prosecutors when appropriate.
3. Operational engagement with community-based and resident-involved program elements for sustainability.

On August 16, 2018, an intelligence working group was hosted at the Delaware Valley Intelligence Center (DVIC) – a cooperative intelligence center managed by PPD and home of the Real-Time Crime Center. This meeting was attended by Inspectors from PPD's DVIC, East Division, Narcotics Strike Force and Field Unit, the Office of Attorney General (OAG) along with several DVIC intelligence analysts and PPD East Division's police captains and the FBI HUMINT squad. The goal was to combine the street knowledge of the "top cops" in Kensington with the available intelligence and data from the DVIC to establish a list of the highest-volume and most violent drug corners. This list serves as a basis for assessment and re-assessment of the groups and individuals acting as crime-drivers in that area.

In Philadelphia, active drug organizations with established leadership structure and roles are referred to as "DTOs" (i.e., drug-trafficking organizations) and distinguished from the less-structured groups engaging in corner drug sales. DTOs smuggle, produce, transport, and distribute large quantities of illicit drugs. By the end of that first meeting, the KI had identified a set of DTOs selling illegal opioids to prioritize based on data showing high volume drug sales, significant violence, or both. Concentrations of overdose locations were also examined. Using all available data and the locations of the prioritized DTOs, the working group created a street boundary for the KI, shown in Figure 1.

The first criminal investigation (or "job") began later that month. In the months following, a pared down working group continued to meet to further discuss a cross-agency strategy that could adequately address the many pressing issues in Kensington-Fairhill. Staff from the MDO were brought in to round out the community-based elements. A guiding document was written to outline the ways in which this approach would be different from "business as usual" for each of the partnering agencies. In addition to focusing on the DTOs selling illegal opioids and engaging in violence, law

enforcement partners assess the added harm to communities by examining the extent to which the DTOs sell fentanyl, mix it with and/or conceal it in other drugs. In Philadelphia and across the country, fentanyl is involved in more deaths than any other illicit drug. It is driving the ongoing opioid crisis.[4]

Figure 1. Kensington Initiative Focus Area
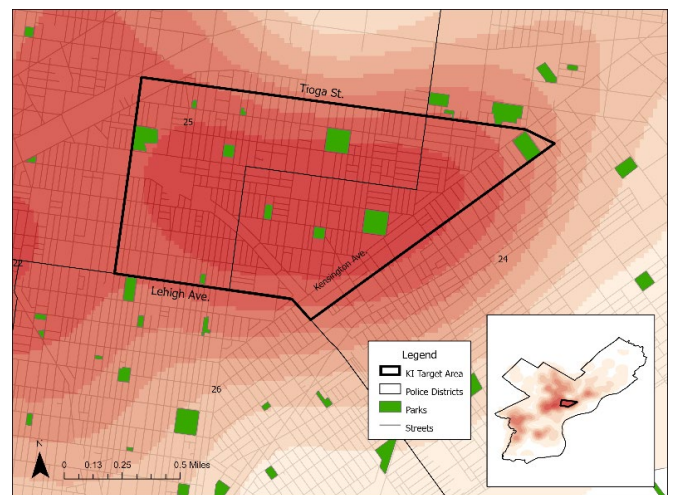
Through working group discussions, the key elements of the KI were crystalized into a cross-agency approach. Representatives from the OAG, MDO and FBI reached out to a Temple University academic to add a research partner. Together the working group applied and received the BJA grant that would allow them to formalize the strategy and provide resources for the development of an internal and external research component that includes performance measurement and evaluation.

The components of the KI include:

- Intensive location-based investigations that involve carefully-coordinated efforts across law enforcement partners to delineate the DTO's membership and set up a long-term investigation with resources from multiple agencies – collaboration to an extent not typically seen in this setting, which expands the goals beyond immediate crime reduction to community well-being.
- One state attorney, housed in the Drug Strike Force Section that works with BNI at the OAG, is assigned to prosecute all the defendants in each case, across all investigations. This lead attorney is involved with the investigation from its origin (i.e., selecting focal corners)

to the day of the DTO coordinated enforcement activities (i.e., arrests) and through sentencing for all court cases.

- Community-based efforts by the MDO related to each investigation. These efforts include addressing social and physical disorder, such as cleaning up trash, fixing broken windows and streetlights, boarding up abandoned buildings, and graffiti removal. These efforts are targeted to the focal street blocks surrounding the location of the DTO. Many of these efforts were included as part of the MDO's Resilience Project, which was operational between October 2018 and December 2019. After the conclusion of the Resilience Project, community-based efforts to maintain and improve the physical environment and ongoing efforts related to referring residents to treatment and social services continued on as part of additional coordinated efforts by city offices.
- A grant-funded KI staff person skilled in research, based internally at the OAG as program manager to develop and maintain performance measures and manage aspects of data acquisition from outside partners.
- An experienced academic partner who is evaluating the impact of the initiative and providing support for the development of a performance measurement system.

The Appendix at the back of this brief provides an overview of the KI strategy using the logic model developed to guide performance measurement and evaluation. Logic models are program planning and evaluation tools that, through graphical representation, define the flow of resources, activities, and resulting outputs from activities. Together, these elements describe the theory of change that leads to the targeted outcomes (i.e., measurable goals).

The KI Project Director leads the strategy. The Director's role is as a state attorney in the Drug Strike Force Section of the OAG. The Drug Strike Force is comprised of the attorneys assigned to each of the eight geographic regions of the Commonwealth. BNI is made up of narcotics agents and supervisors divided into the same eight regions. Drug Strike Force attorneys and BNI agents in each region work together on all investigations. BNI Region 2 is focused on three counties in southeastern Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia, which is considered by many to be the epicenter of the opioid epidemic. The KI Project Manager is employed by the OAG and acts as liaison between the OAG and the Temple

University research partner. The PPD is a key partner in this initiative. Three PPD officers are stationed at the OAG/BNI region office as well as a SEPTA officer (with canine) and HSI agent. This investigative team works together on each job. Agents at the DEA and the PA State Police are also available to assist in any aspect of an investigation; but these agents are not embedded in the OAG like those from PPD, SEPTA and HSI. The OAG Gun Violence Task Force becomes involved whenever a gun is seized during a job, including on the day of the arrests/enforcement operation. This is a specialized unit within the OAG dedicated to weapons. An organizational chart is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. KI Organizational Chart
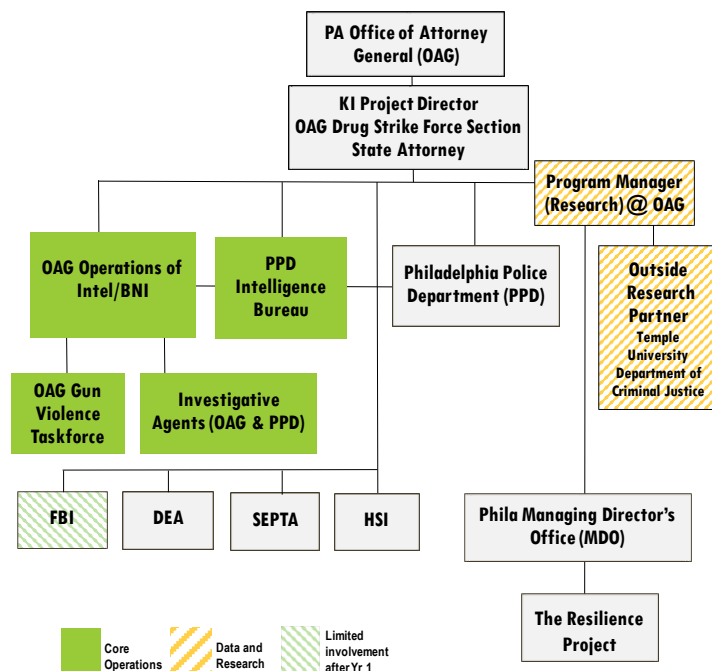
Studies examining the history of drug law enforcement efforts show that disruptions in drug flow may only be temporary, yet disruption is still important and can have positive impacts for the local community. Careful investigation and prosecution may not eliminate the source of drugs, but could alter trafficking routes and, in turn, reduce some of the supply and attendant violence. Furthermore, by supplementing enforcement and prosecution with place-conscious restorative elements, the strategy supports distressed blocks and the residents who live there. It is also important for partners to carefully think about how to define "success" and

to be realistic about the outcomes from this intervention that only touches a subset of drug trafficking corners throughout the focus area. There remain many services and other efforts, even law enforcement activities (particularly at the local level) occurring in the area, which are not part of the KI. The process evaluation, in concert with the impact evaluation, will help connect the dots and determine how components and activities of the KI may have been related to the outcomes that occurred. The research will be able to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses within the KI's design and improve any future replication or expansion.

Philadelphia and the Kensington-Fairhill Focus Area

Kensington-Fairhill, located in the northeastern portion of Philadelphia, comprises roughly 1.4 square miles with a population size of nearly 38,000 people, the majority of whom have Puerto Rican or Dominican heritage. The area experiences deep structural disadvantage, with roughly twice as many residents below the federal poverty line when compared to the city as a whole. Many historic forces, local and extra-local, have come together to undermine living conditions in Kensington. This area originated as an important working class neighborhood of Philadelphia, with employment dominated by the fishing and shipbuilding trades due to the nearby waterfront. By the mid-19th century, Kensington transitioned to a manufacturing hub for the region and soon became a leading center for the textile industry. However, de-industrialization swept the country's urban areas and had a deep impact in Kensington, resulting in stark economic decline by the 1950s. Historians and ethnographic researchers report that the large warehouses and abandoned buildings, coupled with its relatively-isolated location but available pedestrian and vehicle routes (making it accessible to outsiders seeking drugs) led to Kensington becoming a haven for drug dealers. These same issues have made policing the area difficult as well. By the late 1960s, open air drug markets proliferated.

Today, Philadelphia is a leading regional and multi-state source of supply for high-grade heroin and has earned the unfortunate distinction of having more overdose deaths than any big city in the U.S., with over 1,150 victims dying in 2019 alone. The overdose death rate each year in Philadelphia tends to be at least three times higher than the national rate. In the first six months of 2020, nearly 600 people died from a drug overdose in Philadelphia – the great majority of which were opioid-related.

Within Philadelphia, Kensington-Fairhill is ground zero with the highest concentration of accidental overdose deaths. Many of these overdose victims are not residents of Kensington, but consumers who have traveled from other neighborhoods and from out of town. Overdose data from the DEA indicate that in 2018, more than a quarter of Philadelphia overdose victims (28%) traveled *over* one-half of a mile to their overdose location. And roughly 13% of 2018 overdose deaths were of non-Philadelphia residents coming from other parts of Pennsylvania, the larger tri-state area, and beyond. Kensington's drug trade infects suburban and rural neighborhoods as well. DEA analysts examined a three-month snapshot (January-March 2018) of overdose victims in Bucks, Montgomery, Chester, and Delaware Counties and identified 15 different heroin stamps linked directly to Kensington suppliers. Analysis of data from the DEA Heroin Domestic Monitor Program (HDMP) shows that heroin marketed in Philadelphia is consistently among the most pure and inexpensive in the United States. Some Kensington DTOs sell as much as 100 to 150 "racks" of heroin each day, divvied up into bundles and then split into doses, where doses (.03 grams) sell for roughly $10 on the street. The *monthly* take home for a DTO like this would be upwards of $500,000. In 2018, concern over rising opioid overdose deaths was the impetus for the mayor of Philadelphia's executive order declaring a disaster in the neighborhood.

Drug markets also are problematic with regard to violence. Many in the law enforcement community have suggested the increasing demand for fentanyl and other illegal opioids is a significant contributor to spikes in violent crime. Since 2012, the 25th Police District, which includes much of the northern portion and the western side of the KI focus area, has had more murders, shooting victims, and recovered firearms annually than any other district in the city. The 24th Police District, in which the eastern portion of the KI focus area falls, was not far behind in each category. Calendar year 2020 was no exception. During a year fraught with the Covid-19 pandemic, summer protests around racial justice, economic insecurities and pandemic-related changes to police patrol activities, fatal and nonfatal shootings in Philadelphia soared. The city had 499 homicides – a number not seen since 1990.

Kensington-Fairhill itself saw an alarming increase in shootings, as shown in Table 1. Table 1 compares the KI focus area to other Philadelphia neighborhoods that annually have ranked high on gun violence. To create this table, the research team mapped shootings, drug arrests and overdose deaths throughout the city and then aggregated the spatially--placed data points by neighborhood using the boundary definitions that have been established by the Public Health Management Corporation (and used in research for many years).

Table 1. Overdose Deaths, Drug Arrests, and Shooting Victim Rates, per 1000, by Neighborhood, 2016-2020

	Kensington-Fairhill	Paschall-Kingsess-ing	Straw-berry Mansion	Nice-town-Tioga	Point Breeze
Overdose deaths					
2016	2.49	0.36	0.52	0.75	0.41
2017	3.96	0.29	0.58	1.07	0.65
2018	2.86	0.50	0.58	0.73	0.37
2019	3.45	0.63	0.92	1.07	0.78
2020 (quarter 1)	0.92	0.10	0.21	0.27	0.17
Drug arrests					
2016	89.26	2.74	8.07	11.14	3.57
2017	127.68	4.14	7.34	16.30	4.28
2018	129.41	5.46	4.25	10.98	3.74
2019	118.21	7.43	4.55	12.54	2.79
2020[a]	58.27	3.51	3.42	4.91	1.43
Shooting victims					
2016	2.59	1.47	2.29	3.06	1.19
2017	3.39	1.83	2.93	2.12	0.75
2018	3.10	1.90	2.51	2.82	0.88
2019	3.28	1.80	2.84	3.46	0.92
2020	5.84	3.58	4.46	4.91	1.09

Notes: For this table, the Kensington-Fairhill neighborhood is defined by *the census tracts* that are within or partly within the KI Focus Area (see Fig. 1). Rates were constructed by aggregating Census tract counts, and thus may differ from totals reported elsewhere for neighborhoods. Overdose death data from the DEA. Drug arrest data include arrests for possession and sales, and are from the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. Shooting victim data are from PPD via Open Data Philly. All rates are per 1,000 population (population data from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates). [a]2020 drug arrest data not complete.

As the table shows, by no means was Kensington-Fairhill the only neighborhood to experience sharp increases in the rate of shooting victimizations during 2020. Still, the neighborhood experienced a particularly high share of shootings relative to its population, with the 2020 shooting victim rate in Kensington-Fairhill exceeding that of the second-highest neighborhood in Table 1 by 19% (5.84 per 1,000 population in Kensington-Fairhill vs. 4.91 per 1,000 in Nicetown-Tioga).

Overall, the table highlights that Kensington-Fairhill ranks higher than other neighborhoods in Philadelphia for a number of years on rates for accidental overdose deaths, drug arrests, and shooting victims. Since 2016, Kensington-Fairhill has outpaced other neighborhoods in the rate of overdose deaths by more than threefold. For example, Kensington-Fairhill saw roughly 3.5 overdose deaths per 1,000 people in 2019, compared to 1 overdose death per 1,000 people in neighboring Nicetown-Tioga. This pattern holds for drug arrests as well. Even in 2017, the year Nicetown-Tioga saw its highest rate of drug arrests, Kensington-Fairhill exceeded this rate by more than 680%. Taken together, these data illustrate how Kensington-Fairhill bears the brunt of multiple public health and public safety issues at once, situating it for a comprehensive strategy like the KI.

Research and Evaluation on the Kensington Initiative

The BJA-funded grant supports a number of research tasks throughout the grant's two-year timeline. The BNI Project Manager, hired through grant funds, coordinates all research efforts to quantify law enforcement activities for each investigation, and assists with developing a robust process and impact evaluation strategy. The Project Manager works closely with the Temple University research team. Although the pandemic has slowed down access to data from PPD, which limits the ability to conduct an impact evaluation, the research team regularly tracks investigative processes and has analyzed changes in and factors related to overdose deaths in the focus area. While process and outcome evaluation findings will not be forthcoming until late 2021 or early 2022, below we provide an overview of the first five investigations with regard to tracked performance outputs.

As of March 1, 2021, a total of five KI jobs have been completed, resulting in the execution of 111 search warrants, in which agents seized:

- More than 12½ kilos of heroin and fentanyl [416,667 doses]
- Roughly 2 kilos of cocaine and crack cocaine
- Roughly 14 ounces of marijuana
- Hundreds of pills including oxycodone and morphine
- Thousands of doses of Xylazine – an animal sedative and common cutting agent
- $649,364 in cash
- 31 guns (handguns, long guns)
- More than 1,000 rounds of ammunition, magazines
- Miscellaneous gun parts

In addition, 93 people have been arrested (see Table 2).

Arrestees from only the first two investigations (fifteen arrestees) have been formally prosecuted at this time. As a result of Covid-19, prosecution outcomes are still forthcoming for investigations three through five. Of the 15 cases prosecuted so far, however, no cases were dropped and all defendants pled guilty. The length of a typical investigation averages seven months and, from beginning to arrests, requires the work of ten agents (uniformed, undercover, PPD, BNI) – except for one investigation (Job 5) that involved considerably more. The PPD provides extensive support and assistance throughout each job and on the day the arrests happen. Pennsylvania State Police officers and agents from SEPTA also assist as needed in the form of pedestrian and car stops and/or canine operations.

Table 2. Kensington Initiative Performance Measures, Arrest and Prosecution, August 2018 to February 28, 2021

Arrest & Prosecution Outcomes	Job 1	Job 2	Job 3	Job 4	Job 5
Total number of people arrested	3	12	30	12	35
Number arrested on day of takedown	3	12	28	10	35
Number of people *not* on DTO focus list that were arrested	0	0	0	0	4
Number of individuals known to LE on DTO List	3	12	34	12	34
Percentage of known DTO members arrested	100%	100%	88%	100%	91%
Total number of people prosecuted	3	12	*	*	*
Number of defendants that entered guilty pleas	3	12	*	*	*
Cases dropped/dismissed	0	0	*	*	2*
Sentences > 2 years	2	8	*	*	*
Sentences < 2 years	1	2	*	*	*
Average time to initial appearance	3.7 mo. (*range 2-7*)	3 mo.	*	*	*
Average time from arrest to disposition	7.8 mo.	7.8 mo.	*	*	*
Average amount of bail requested/bail outcome	$417K	$20M	*	*	*
Range of bail	*$250K-$750K*	*$1-$30M*			

* *Information still being collected/not yet known*

I've heard the people of Kensington loud and clear – they want violent criminals and dangerous drugs out of their neighborhoods so that they can walk down the street with their families without fear. The Kensington Initiative was designed to restore that sense of safety to this community.

- Josh Shapiro, Attorney General of PA
October 8, 2019 Press Release

Reporting of performance measures is ongoing. The research team also has been working closely with the shooting victim records and overdose death data to better understand trends and assess the factors that have created and helped maintain the dual epidemics of shootings and overdose events in Kensington-Fairhill. In a recent analysis, researchers, working with the KI Program Manager and a member from the DEA, examined whether deaths from accidental drug overdose

were particularly clustered around street corners controlled by drug trafficking groups. Using a micro-spatial approach focused on small street corner units, they found strong support for the association between corner drug markets and accidental overdose deaths. Not only were drug corners themselves associated with higher rates of overdose deaths, but street corners close in proximity to all other prioritized-for-law-enforcement-action drug corners were associated with higher rates of overdose deaths. This means that even corners that are not DTO-controlled may experience more accidental overdose deaths because they are centrally located or "spatially proximate" to all other drug market corners. In addition, a number of socio-structural factors, such as concentrated disadvantage, and physical environmental factors, particularly blighted housing, were associated with a higher rate of overdose deaths. The study was published recently in the open access journal *Social Sciences*. The authors stressed that the findings highlighted the need for carefully-targeted efforts like the KI that strategically coordinate law enforcement, social service provision and reductions in housing blight focused on specific street blocks.

In summary, the KI is a timely initiative operating in a neighborhood that has serious public health and safety needs. Traditional law enforcement approaches to combating the dual epidemics have thus far not been effective at creating large-scale change in this community. The impetus for the KI as a whole, including applying for the federal grant, was a group of engaged stakeholders attempting to problem solve at the ground level. Many law enforcement units across multiple agencies and city departments already working separately in this area combined resources and efforts in a data-driven way, and purposely sought out a research partner. It is rare for these types of collaborative initiatives—both

across law enforcement agencies and from law enforcement to academic partner—to originate internally like this. Research suggests that partnerships that begin in this manner are typically more successful and easier to sustain than those that are reactive to available grant funding or external pressures to add a research partner. Regardless of what the impact evaluation determines, the cross-agency nature of this collaboration and the commitment of its members will likely remain a great strength of this initiative.

Acknowledgments

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[1] *Office of Attorney General, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

[2] *Temple University, Department of Criminal Justice, Philadelphia, PA*

[3] Agencies participating in Job 3 include: Office of Attorney General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Philadelphia Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations, PA National Guard Counterdrug Joint Task Force, SEPTA Police, U.S. Postal Inspectors, Pennsylvania State Police, Montgomery County SWAT, Lehigh County District Attorney's Office, Hatboro Borough Police Department, Whitemarsh Township Police Department, Warrington Police Department, Allentown Police Department, and Lancaster County Drug Task Force.

[4] Drug Enforcement Administration (2019). National Drug Threat Assessment. DEA-DCT-DIR-007-20.

Appendix: Kensington Initiative Logic Model

PROBLEM	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES

PROBLEM
- High opioid use
- Drug trafficking
- Influx of fentanyl
- Interpersonal and group-based violence
- High rates of community violence/exposure to violence
- Few culturally-competent service options
- Limited community resources for treatment and health care
- High level of physical and social incivilities
- Low services utilization rate

KI GOALS
1. Reduce group-related, place-based violence
2. Reduce overdose deaths
3. Improve quality of life for residents of Kensington-Fairhill

RESOURCES
- Dedicated state agency (OAG) focus on violent and drug crimes
- Collaboration from federal agencies
- Local intelligence/resources & technology
- Focus on evidence-based practices
- Clear, actionable strategy
- Strong oversight/ management plan
- Data-driven targeting of hot groups for violence and drug trafficking
- Research and evaluation provided by research partner
- Performance management system for feedback, assessment and re-evaluation

ACTIVITIES
- Collaborative, cross-agency meetings
- Bi-weekly investigative meetings
- Monthly Exec Team Meetings
- Intelligence sharing
- Development of and continuous review of priority street corners
- Refer street blocks for City-led Opioid Response Team/Resilience Project efforts
- City-prioritization of 311 calls
- Refer to Police-Assisted Diversion
- Monthly reporting on shootings, drug arrests and other violent crime, and whether group assessment of sociodemographic, spatial, and temporal factors associated with crime
- Review by US Attorney – cross designation state/federal
- Community outreach efforts

OUTPUTS
- Number of priority corners overall
- Number of priority corners for investigation/takedown
- Number of coordinated, investigative tactics per investigation, by tactic
- Results of coordinated investigations & takedowns (e.g., number of agents; search warrants; arrests; drugs, guns, $ seized, etc.) by target etc.
- Number prosecuted
- Number of successful prosecutions

Physical Environment
- Number homeless
- Lots greened
- Sites of graffiti removed
- Parcels cleaned & sealed

Social Environment
- Number of adults and children outside on block, in park, daytime, after dark

OUTCOMES

SHORT TERM
- Increased knowledge of drivers of violence
- Established performance measurement system
- Perception of greater cross-agency collaboration
- Satisfaction with community services
- Increased SA treatment & healthcare

INTERMEDIATE
- Increased successful gun & drug charges
- Lower levels of group/gang nuisance activity
- Lower levels of physical and social disorder

LONG TERM
- Reduced calls for service
- Reduced shootings
- Reduced drug activity
- Reduced overdoses