

2021 Advocacy Leadership Awards

Award for Individual Achievement in Advocacy



ABOUT DR. KANZONI ASABIGI

Kanzoni Asabigi, MD, PhD, MPH, currently serves as vice president of the Detroit Recovery Project (DRP), an organization in Detroit, Michigan, dedicated to strengthening, rebuilding and empowering communities affected by drug and alcohol addiction and other underserved populations.

Dr. Asabigi has more than 30 years of experience and expertise in infectious diseases, public health and addiction medicine, as well as more than a decade of experience overseeing the substance use disorder (SUD) prevention, treatment and recovery services for the City of Detroit.

Dr. Asabigi was instrumental in Detroit's strategic planning in management of the fentanyl-laced heroin epidemic in 2006. He is currently championing initiatives to combat the opioid crisis through health system interventions, increasing access and referral to behavioral health services, and supporting safe drug disposal efforts.

MAKING A MARK

When the prescription opioid crisis surged in 2017, behavioral health and racial disparities in Detroit were exacerbated. The volume and demand for SUD treatment and recovery support services (RSS) overwhelmed health professionals specializing in addiction. Furthermore, traditional first-responders, as well as emergency department (ED) staff, were stretched beyond capacity.

At that time, the existing policies at the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs posed barriers for clients seeking treatment and challenges for licensed physicians serving individuals with suspected or known SUD. Dr. Asabigi participated in State, County and local advisory boards, as well as task forces, to amplify provider and client concerns and advocate for progressive medication-assisted treatment-related policies and services. His achievements in this capacity include:

- Leading academic-detailing initiatives to educate Wayne County pharmacists and physicians on prescribing practices, the State Naloxone Standing Order and the Good Samaritan Law.
- Convening leadership from three of the largest health systems in Detroit to develop a Peer Recovery Coach model to assist ED staff with facilitating warm handoffs to RSS and treatment.



- Increasing promotion of the Drug Addiction Treatment Act to encourage more Buprenorphine Waivered Practitioners and implementing a take-home naloxone policy.

As vice president of DRP, Dr. Asabigi has been instrumental in innovating public health and behavioral health response efforts throughout Michigan. Other accomplishments include:

- Launching the Building Communities of Recovery initiative by securing multi-year funding through SAMHSA (2,000+ people have engaged in training, education, programming and services).
- Designing a public education campaign to combat stigma using social media, print media and by funding a youth-led web series addressing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- Partnering with the DEA, Detroit police, The Youth Connection, Love Detroit Prevention Coalition (a federally funded drug-free community coalition) and Wayne County to expand participation in the National DEA Prescription Drug Take Back in Detroit.
- Facilitating the coordination of training the entire health department in naloxone administration, in turn increasing the number of naloxone access points embedded in Detroit zip codes most burdened by opioid overdose.
- Increasing the capacity of internal staff and external partners to better identify and service individuals with suspected SUD by supporting Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and Motivational Interviewing training.

Before arriving at DRP, Dr. Asabigi served as senior public health advisor at the City of Detroit Health Department. In this role, he mobilized multi-disciplinary and multi-sector partners around drug policy, prevention, education and harm reduction efforts to combat the opioid crisis. He also partnered with the University of Michigan Injury Prevention Center to launch the System for Opioid Overdose Surveillance, which provides near real-time suspected opioid overdose data.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Asabigi worked with the epidemiology, emergency preparedness, environmental health, communicable disease and behavioral health teams to devise a response strategy. The plan included a specific strategy to target vulnerable populations (i.e., unhoused individuals, people who use drugs and nursing homes) and CDC Foundation engagement.

Thank you, Dr. Kanzoni Asabigi, for making a difference in and beyond your community. And a special thanks to our generous sponsor, [Sunovion Pharmaceuticals](#), for their ongoing support.

