



School of  
Public Health  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR ALCOHOL  
AND ADDICTION STUDIES

JULY 2024

# CAAS Forward: A Vision for Excellence and Impact

Brown University's Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies  
Strategic Plan



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## I. Overview

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**For more than 40 years, Brown University’s Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies (CAAS) has worked to advance research, education and training that improves the well-being of people and communities impacted by substance use and addiction.**

Today, as an internationally renowned center within Brown University’s School of Public Health, CAAS is dedicated to enhancing its societal impact with increasing levels of excellence, innovation and distinction. It does this at a time of growing challenges, needs and opportunities. Alcohol-related mortality in the U.S. has risen over the last decade and overdose deaths, driven by synthetic opioids often in combination with stimulants and alcohol, remain at all-time highs. Communities and governments grappling with the commercialization and widespread increased use of cannabis need trustworthy information about the potential benefits as well as public health harms of cannabis. Tobacco regulation efforts nationally and internationally are at a critical juncture, navigating an evolving marketplace of nicotine products where rigorous science is needed to inform policy. Substance use and substance use disorders remain highly stigmatized, often discouraging compassionate and effective civic and community responses and directly harming those who are impacted. Underserved communities and individuals with marginalized and minoritized social identities are particularly vulnerable to such harms.

With exceptional faculty, staff and trainees conducting research of the highest quality, CAAS has a key role to play in building the evidence base for practices, programs and policies that effectively and equitably prevent and treat substance use and addiction, reduce harms related to use, fight addiction-related stigma and promote pathways to recovery. CAAS approaches this work with substantial academic resources that have emerged over the last decade across the center, the School of Public Health and Brown University, such as faculty growth, new leadership and strengthened attention to research — all of which can be more fully and effectively leveraged to address the most pressing challenges and public health priorities in the areas of substance use and addiction.

To rise to the demands of this evolving landscape and to ensure a thoughtful and strategic approach to its work, the center’s leadership engaged the extended CAAS community in an extensive strategic planning process throughout the 2023-24 academic year, including eliciting input through mission-focused discussions with faculty, staff and trainees. This process led to the creation of *CAAS Forward: A Vision for Excellence and Impact*, which includes redefined mission and vision statements and a set of priorities to guide decision-making and resource allocation over the next five years.

Among the goals of the process was to solidify and expand CAAS’s long-standing role as a leading hub of knowledge creation, training, and dissemination of substance use and addiction research. *CAAS Forward* further focuses CAAS’s work on pressing issues, including promoting harm reduction; centering health equity in research and practice; educating and training a diverse addiction research workforce; and engaging as a trusted community partner in developing, conducting and sharing research to inform public discourse, policy and practice.



## II. Context: CAAS Today

**With 36 core faculty members; 15 postdoctoral fellows, investigators and research associates; over 50 full-time staff; and numerous undergraduate and graduate students working in CAAS research labs, CAAS is well positioned to advance its identified priorities and enhance its public health impact.**

CAAS research and training is supported by over \$100 million in total funding for active projects from a range of professional organizations and federal institutes including the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), and the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Research and community engagement are further supported by a growing endowment enabled, in part, by philanthropic gifts from Professor Damaris Rohsenow, Professor Richard and Diane Longabaugh, the Estate of Helen E. Chaney, the late James Abernathy, the Hanley Family Foundation, and the Donald G. Millar Distinguished Professorship in Alcohol and Addiction Studies. CAAS faculty, trainees, students and staff produce over 175 new peer-reviewed publications each year, making CAAS one of the world's leading sources of science on substance use.

### CAAS AT A GLANCE

OVER  
**\$100**  
MILLION

IN ACTIVE RESEARCH FUNDING

MORE THAN  
**175**  
PEER-REVIEWED PAPERS

PUBLISHED EVERY YEAR

**36** CORE FACULTY, **15** POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS, **50** FULL-TIME STAFF

## III. Moving Forward: Mission and Vision

Following a comprehensive process of interviews, focus groups and peer assessments, the CAAS community defined the following Mission and Vision statements for the center. These reflect and build upon the mission, vision and values of the School of Public Health.

### Mission

The mission of CAAS is to improve the health and well-being of all individuals and communities impacted by substance use and addiction through collaborative, multidisciplinary research, exceptional education and training, and meaningful community engagement.



#### Research

We conduct collaborative, multidisciplinary research on the causes and consequences of substance use and addiction, and on the most effective methods for preventing, treating, and reducing harms and promoting recovery.



#### Education and Training

We provide outstanding education and training in addiction science to a diverse community of exceptional staff, students, trainees and early-career researchers through teaching, mentoring and applied research experiences.



#### Community Engagement

We engage with practitioners, policymakers and the public to reduce stigma around addiction, inform our research priorities, and promote effective and equitable approaches to prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery.

### Vision

We envision a future in which harms from substance use and addiction are prevented, treated and destigmatized for all members of society.



# IV. Fundamental Principles and Commitments

**CAAS Forward is an ambitious plan that focuses on a discrete set of strategic choices to strengthen CAAS's excellence and impact.**

Making progress on the priorities outlined in this document requires a number of fundamental conditions that are central to our success and are part of our ongoing work. Specifically, we are committed to the following principles, which cut across and undergird every aspect of this plan:



## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

CAAS will cultivate a learning community that brings together individuals with diverse perspectives who represent the backgrounds and experiences of the people and communities with which we work and promote a sense of belonging and purpose for all members of CAAS. We will build upon and extend existing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging programs led by the University, school and academic departments to ensure that our research, hiring, supervising, mentoring, training and engagement practices promote the culture and values we seek.



## Operational Excellence

Operational excellence is also essential for CAAS to achieve the aspirations outlined in this plan. We will work to increase communication, share resources and enhance operational capacities within CAAS, and advocate for the central administrative resources that we need to reach our goals.



## Sustainable Resources

Achieving the enumerated goals and priorities will require both identifying new and potentially reallocating existing resources and revenue. Having strategic clarity offers opportunities for increased philanthropy, sponsored funding and targeted hiring.

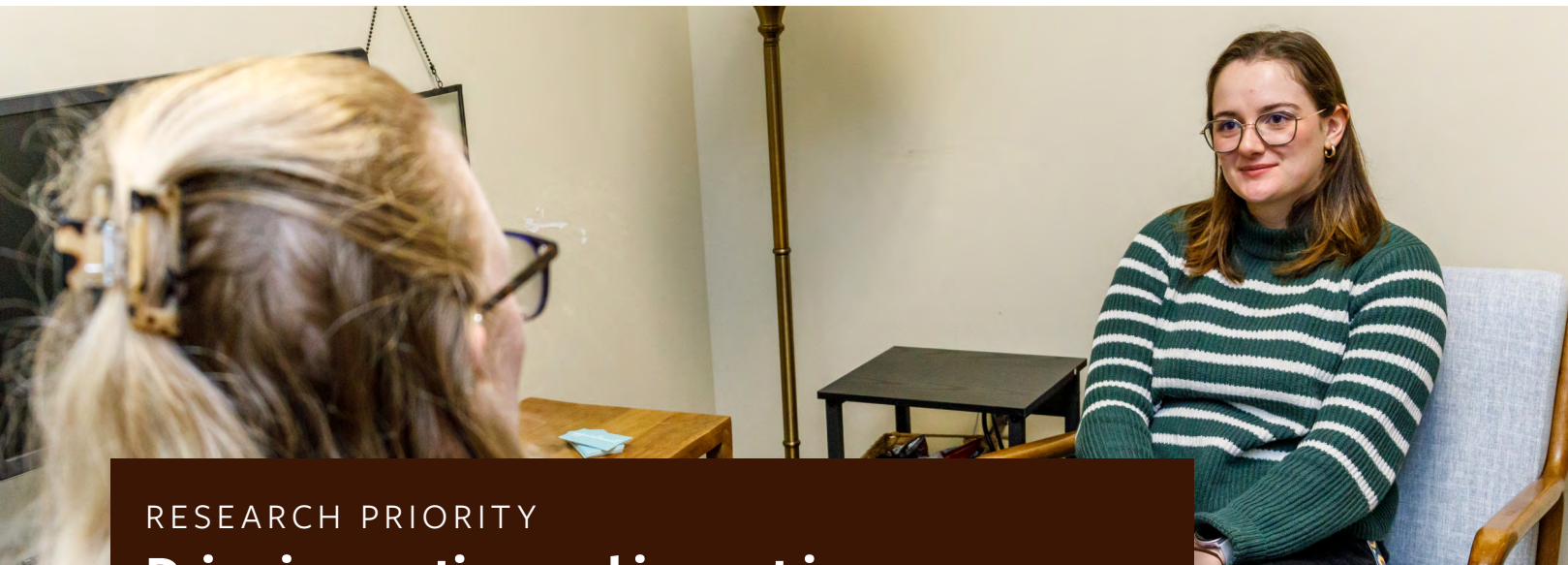
A more detailed operational plan will follow this strategic plan and will include action steps that reflect these principles and commitments.





# V. Strategic Priorities

**Guided by CAAS Forward, CAAS will work to remain at the vanguard of substance use and addiction research—advancing its mission of research, education and training, and community engagement—by leveraging center, school and University strengths; building new and strengthening existing partnerships; inspiring increased philanthropy and sponsored funding; and dedicating resources**



RESEARCH PRIORITY

**Drive innovation and impact in multidisciplinary, collaborative research**

Since our founding in 1982, CAAS has built a reputation for excellence in addiction science and substance use research. Our research strength has propelled CAAS to one of the top addiction research centers in the country; allowed us to attract leading scientists, trainees, students and staff; and enabled us to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in grant funding. As we contemplate the next chapter of research excellence, CAAS seeks to lead at Brown University and in the nation in driving innovation and impact in multidisciplinary, collaborative addiction research. To meet this goal, the strategic planning process identified the following key research strategies:

- Strengthening CAAS's position as a leader in harm reduction research;
- Establishing leadership in innovative, integrated research methodologies;
- Expanding our emerging strengths in social and commercial determinants of health and health equity research;
- Accelerating the rate at which our research informs policymakers and clinicians; and
- Creating and deepening partnerships with organizations and individuals doing adjacent and intersecting work.

Progress in research at CAAS will be facilitated by strategic investments and efforts in three primary ways: 1) faculty hiring, 2) selective investments in developing large-scale grant applications, and 3) deepening engagement with potential partners within Brown. Specifically, we plan to hire at least three faculty members — one tenure-track and two research faculty — over the next five years. These searches will prioritize scholars who bring experience and interest in the areas of greatest importance for CAAS: harm reduction, health equity, community engagement, and translating research to policy and practice. We also will invest in developing at least two large-scale grant applications that engage CAAS faculty around strategically central topics. Finally, we will leverage a variety of expertise that exists within the School of Public Health, Brown University and the affiliated hospitals. Deeper engagement with faculty across these units will enable greater multidisciplinary and clinical relevance in CAAS's research portfolio and enhance our ability to impact practice in the field.

## KEY STRATEGIES:

01

### **Craft and deepen the identity of CAAS as a leader in harm reduction research.**

Harm reduction research prioritizes decreasing the negative consequences of substance use rather than focusing exclusively on reducing the prevalence of substance use or on treatment and recovery. Consistent with our principles as a center, a harm reduction approach is, at its core, humanistic, justice-oriented, pragmatic and equity-focused. Much of the work happening at CAAS today is focused on harm reduction across alcohol, nicotine, tobacco, cannabis, opioid and stimulant use, but we have not yet developed a compelling narrative to describe our efforts in this way and to leverage synergies across discrete projects that can have greater impact on the field. CAAS will take a number of actions to aggressively advance this work, including developing a persuasive narrative to describe CAAS's current efforts and impact around harm reduction. We will seek to expand the breadth of our work on polysubstance use and related harms, including overdose; and on substance use and co-occurring conditions including alcohol and cancer, substance use and pain, and substance use and mental and physical health conditions. We will pursue a large-scale grant opportunity that will provide funding and administrative support to fully unlock our potential in these areas.

02

### **Establish CAAS as a leader in innovative integrated methodologies for understanding and intervening on substance use and related harms.**

CAAS has deep expertise in laboratory, intervention development, assessment and ecological methods of research. We will work to make these research capacities a more coherent and visible set of expertise that can be accessed not only by faculty at CAAS but by researchers outside of CAAS. We will explore strategic partnerships with faculty at the School of Public Health and across Brown to more fully leverage areas of excellence; apply for grant mechanisms that support, build upon and coalesce these strengths; and develop an outward-facing platform to better enable University and external partners to access and leverage this expertise in research methodologies.





## KEY STRATEGIES (CONT'D):

03

### **Expand research on social determinants of health and interventions to achieve health equity**

Such research is essential to ensuring that advances in the science of prevention and treatment reach all people and communities. This focus on health equity research capitalizes on the relatively unique position of CAAS as an addiction research center housed in a school of public health. CAAS will focus strategically on developing and conducting research that addresses how social and structural factors impact substance use — including elucidating individual, interpersonal, and community strengths and resilience, and testing interventions that most effectively serve diverse populations across diverse social contexts.

04

### **Accelerate the translation of CAAS research into public health and clinical practice**

CAAS's mission calls for conducting research not simply for its own sake, but to advance knowledge that improves the well-being of people and communities affected by substance use and addiction. To ensure the insights from our research are able to impact public policy and clinical practice, we will seek to enhance our capacity to conduct implementation science research — both through greater training in the area for CAAS faculty, staff, and trainees and greater collaboration with implementation science and clinical experts across Brown. Further, we will increase our focus on policy-relevant research that is connected with a broad array of state and community stakeholders.

05

### **Serve as a hub to establish and deepen relationships with partners and organizations that do adjacent and intersecting work**

As we look to the future, CAAS is committed to building and sustaining robust partnerships across the School of Public Health, Warren Alpert Medical School, the University and the affiliated hospitals. We seek to leverage and help advance the research and work happening within CAAS and explore how we can accelerate and build upon work being done by other addiction-focused clinicians and researchers at Brown. We will actively seek to articulate the processes and benefits associated with CAAS affiliation, more intentionally recruit faculty from across Brown to be part of our center, and support venues for bringing addictions researchers together across the Brown system.





#### EDUCATION AND TRAINING PRIORITY

**Provide multiple pathways to prepare and empower diverse staff, students, trainees and early-career investigators to lead and shape the field of addiction science.**

For over three decades, CAAS has implemented premiere training programs focused on the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders. The postdoctoral training program, supported by T32 grants from both NIAAA and NIDA, is among the largest and most competitive in the country. More than 200 postdoctoral fellows and research associates have completed the training program, with program alumni holding major professorships and leadership positions across the country. Additionally, numerous faculty have started their careers at CAAS, benefiting from a unique network of outstanding collaborators and mentors. Likewise, students and staff working at CAAS develop advanced research skills and regularly publish on the studies they are involved with, and many have gone on to future training at the masters, doctoral and postdoctoral level after leaving Brown.

As we look to the future of CAAS's impact in education and training, we will advance the following key strategies:

- Building on the excellence of our postdoctoral training program;
- Supporting early-career faculty in their development;
- Actively engaging with students at Brown University, particularly within the School of Public Health; and
- Enhancing training, professional development and career advancement opportunities for CAAS staff.

The following strategic priorities will be pursued to ensure that CAAS remains at the forefront of addiction workforce training and a leader in developing early-career researchers:

#### KEY STRATEGIES:

01

**Building on a tradition of excellence, create distinct tracks for postdoctoral training that directly reflect CAAS's mission, prepare trainees to lead in the field and take into account trainee career goals.**

In the coming year, CAAS will undertake a process to evaluate and enhance postdoctoral training program pathways that provide highly personalized development opportunities for trainees. The goals will include empowering postdoctoral trainees to build rewarding careers and compete for meaningful appointments nationwide and to expand CAAS's influence and impact through our talented network of program graduates. We will also explore prioritizing admission criteria to attract scholars who are interested in research areas aligned with our priorities of harm reduction and health equity.

02

**Strengthen and expand training opportunities for early-career addiction scientists**

In particular, CAAS will apply for a K12 grant to support our mission of training outstanding early-career scientists, with a priority for recruiting faculty who focus on harm reduction and health equity. We will also explore developing additional programs that train scientists both internal and external to Brown, such as NIH R25 programs and summer institutes.

03

**Develop plans and priorities to determine how CAAS, as a center focused on research, training and engagement, can best engage with students at Brown University**

CAAS will establish a task force to explore structured and enhanced opportunities for engagement with students at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral level. Once complete, CAAS will develop detailed plans for supporting selected initiatives that make more visible and meaningful the opportunities available to students at CAAS and that provide greater support and consistency for faculty who work with students.

04

**Provide professional development opportunities and career pathways for staff**

Staff are integral to the research, education and training that CAAS offers, and investing in ongoing professional development and networking opportunities will benefit both individual staff members and the center's mission. CAAS will establish a task force to explore specific strategies to promote staff professional growth, such as supporting research presentation and publication opportunities; mentoring around graduate school and research careers; sponsoring skill development workshops; defining career pathways; and promoting opportunities for engagement with CAAS, the School of Public Health and the University.





#### ENGAGEMENT PRIORITY

**Be a leading source of accessible, evidence-based research aimed at reducing stigma around addiction and promoting effective and equitable approaches to prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery.**

The primary value of CAAS's research, education and training is the impact of these efforts on the individuals, families and communities most affected by substance use and addiction. Realizing this value requires deliberate effort to translate and disseminate research findings to inform evidence-based policy and practice. CAAS is committed to public and community engagement at multiple levels, with the ultimate goal of reducing addiction-related stigma and promoting equitable policies and practices grounded in science. CAAS is committed to:

- Building collaborative, bi-directional relationships with community members and organizations;
- Enhancing the skills of CAAS members to engage effectively with diverse communities;
- Working actively to influence local, state and federal policy development; and
- Translating and disseminating research findings to key stakeholders and the public.

These key strategies fit within the context of a broader, University-wide commitment to long-term, sustained community engagement, which is also being spearheaded by the School of Public Health. For each goal and supporting action, we will identify potential partners and resources that may be leveraged.

#### KEY STRATEGIES:

01

### **Create sustained and sustainable opportunities to engage communities intended to be served by research to inform ongoing inquiry**

Improving the well-being of individuals and communities affected by addiction and substance use disorders through research and education demands having an authentic understanding of the experience and needs of those individuals and communities. This, in turn, requires building trusted and enduring collaborative, bidirectional relationships with community members and organizations to ensure that they meaningfully inform, shape, and benefit from the research CAAS conducts. To accomplish this, CAAS will identify and prioritize current and potential community stakeholders, policy agencies, and officials for our work. We will establish a robust and ongoing mechanism for consulting with community members and organizations to ensure that our research addresses pressing stakeholder concerns, is informed by those impacted by substance use, and is responsive to community concerns about researcher behaviors that stigmatize or otherwise harm participants.

02

### **Ensure that the CAAS community is prepared with the knowledge and skills to engage effectively with diverse communities impacted by substance use**

Engaging communities constructively requires building trust, understanding current and historical context – including the engagement of other partners and collaborators – and possessing the needed skills to cultivate meaningful relationships that will facilitate shared goals. Individuals and offices within CAAS, the School of Public Health, and Brown University can help guide CAAS's expanding efforts in this area. CAAS will work with them to prepare faculty and staff to engage effectively and ethically with community members and organizations, establish guidelines and best practices for faculty, trainees and staff involved in community engagement, and invest resources to evaluate community engagement activities at multiple levels.



## KEY STRATEGIES (CONT'D):

03

### Advance policy influence at the city, state and federal levels.

Substance use and addiction are pressing issues facing states and municipalities, and elected and appointed government officials and advocacy organizations seek to address these matters through policy development and legislative action. As a recipient of University-based sponsored funding to support research and education, CAAS has both an interest in and a responsibility to offer research-based evidence to policymakers to inform their work in ways that advance effective solutions, serve health equity and address the harms of stigma. To strengthen efforts in this area, CAAS will develop a plan to identify goals, target audiences, strategies and metrics for assessing policy influence and impact. This plan will include tactics such as strengthening faculty awareness of and skills for informing relevant city, state and federal policies and identifying opportunities for CAAS faculty and staff to serve on relevant federal, state and local policy-related bodies.

04

### Serve as a leading trusted resource for individuals, communities, policymakers and practitioners.

Achieving the goals of reducing stigma around addiction and promoting effective and equitable approaches to prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery calls for making the exceptional research conducted by CAAS faculty, trainees and staff widely available and accessible. CAAS will seek to understand in a deeper way the needs and interests of individuals, communities, policymakers and practitioners in areas that align with the center's expertise, and to elevate the visibility of relevant research findings through enhanced communication and outreach efforts. This will include developing a strategic communication plan and a suite of communication tools and benefiting from professional communications expertise.



## VI. Conclusion

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*CAAS Forward: A Vision for Excellence and Impact* offers a guide for raising and allocating resources to advance and extend our existing work as scientists, scholars and educators to improve the well-being of people and communities impacted by substance use and addiction. We will rely on this plan to inform our engagement with researchers across Brown and its affiliated clinical partners, as well as with civic and community partners across the state. A detailed operational plan will outline specifically how we plan to achieve these strategic priorities — and hold ourselves accountable for progress — in the months and years to come.

As we look to the future, we are inspired by CAAS's progress over the last several decades and motivated by the continued need we see in society. The successful pursuit of this plan will move us closer toward achieving our vision of destigmatizing addiction and preventing and treating harms from substance use and addiction for all members of society.