

A life-saving Rx for Skid Row? Methadone, harm reduction & reparations

featuring Nyabingi Kuti



This time on Code WACK!

This time on **Code WACK!** What can be done about the fentanyl crisis on Los Angeles' Skid Row that disproportionately affects Black residents? What policy solutions are needed? *In light of the historical evidence of racial disparities in the criminal justice and healthcare systems, should reparations be considered?*

To find out, we spoke to [Nyabingi Kuti](#), director of the **LA Harm Reduction Network**. *Harm reduction, an evidence-based public health approach, focuses on reducing harmful consequences of substance use.* It meets people where they're at and acknowledges that many people aren't willing or able to stop using. *This is the second episode in a two-part series.*

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WE DISCUSS

Last time we talked about the fentanyl epidemic on Skid Row, which disproportionately affects Black residents. What can we do about it?

"I'm working on a few policies. One is to increase access to methadone. Methadone has been proven to be effective for fentanyl users.

"...there's not one methadone clinic on Skid Row, which is the heart of the opioid/ fentanyl epidemic. So I've been avidly working with advocates to change that, to get a methadone clinic on Skid Row and then also looking at increasing the number of residential treatment beds. That's a real big issue. –

Nyabingi Kuti

How do substance abuse, incarceration and homelessness intersect?

"Mental health and substance use disorder are the driving factors behind incarceration.

"The majority of the people that are homeless have been in the criminal justice system so there's a revolving door between incarceration and these behavioral health issues." – ***Nyabingi Kuti***

How is the LA Harm Reduction Network tackling this public health emergency?

"I have a proposal that I'm working on getting support for, to provide reparations to Black residents of Skid Row because I feel that if we could put a dent in the people that are addicted, that are Black on Skid Row, that will be a really good way of dealing with the whole crisis 'cause that's the majority that has the problem. And you know, some people say, well, you know, 'reparations, that's race-based.'

“Yes and these problems that we're seeing have their basis in racism and economic and racial disparities.” – ***Nyabingi Kuti***

Helpful Links

[Data Report: Fentanyl Overdoses in Los Angeles County](#), *Los Angeles County Dept of Public Health and Substance Abuse, Prevention and Control*

[Harm Reduction](#), *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*

[Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction](#), *National Institute on Drug Abuse*

[50-year war on drugs imprisoned millions of Black Americans](#), *Associated Press*

[California Task Force Highlights Racist Drug War Policies in Report On Reparations For Black Americans](#), *Marijuana Moment*

[What led to the opioid crisis—and how to fix it](#), *Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health*

[The California Reparations Report](#), *State of California Department of Justice*

Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#).

Guest Biography - Nyabingi Kuti

Nyabingi Kuti is the director of the LA Harm Reduction Network with the goal to expand and enhance access to substance use disorder treatment for LA County in general and Skid Row in particular.

He has done policy advocacy for Tarzana Treatment Centers, The Drug Policy Alliance, The LA County Department of Mental Health and other organizations.

He also has done radio and public presentations on the drug overdose epidemic, expanding access to addiction treatment for the homeless and reentry community, and community violence.

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