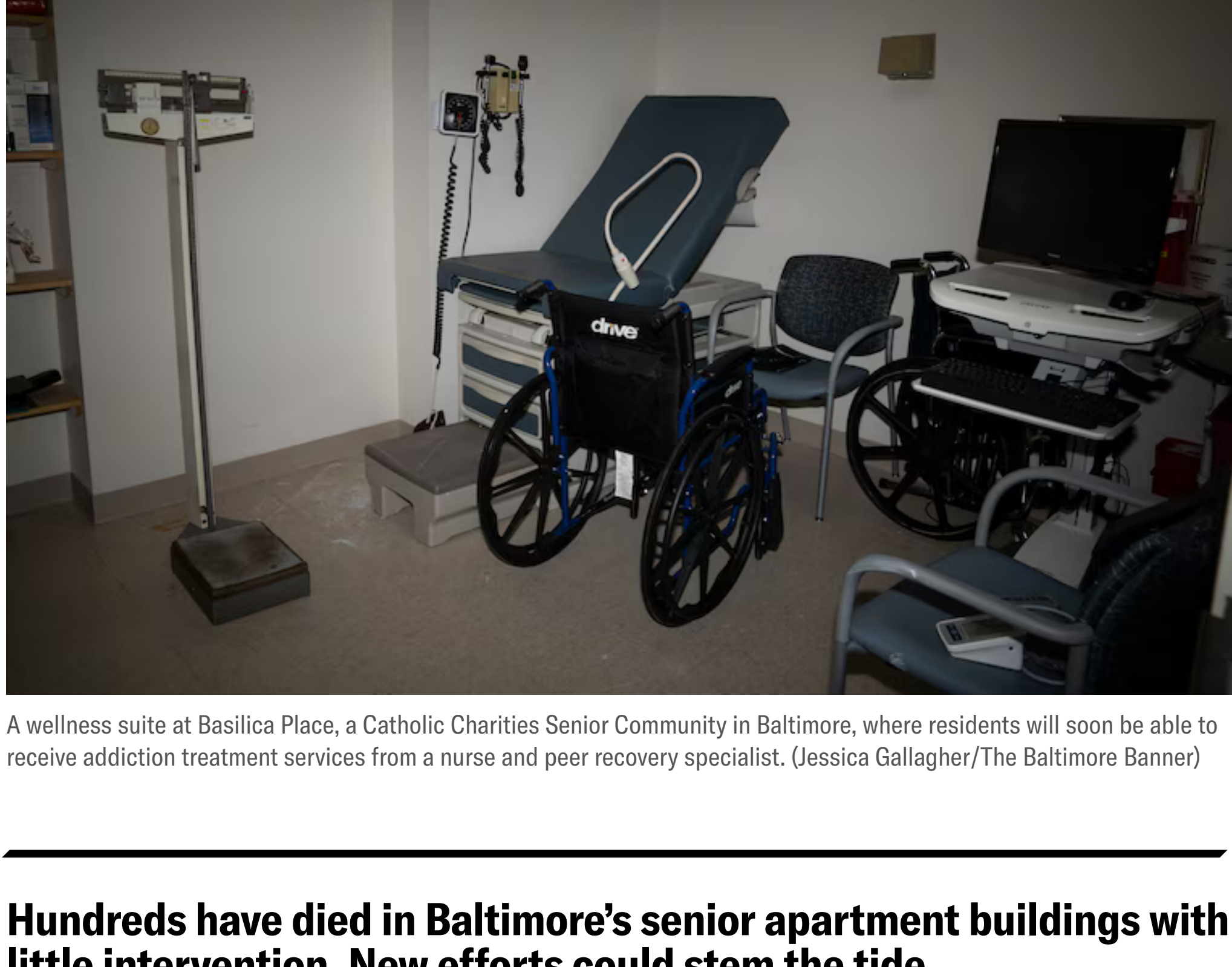


COMMUNITY ISSUES Criminal Justice Housing Health Environment Transportation

Baltimore seniors have died at shocking rates from drug overdoses. Help is on the way.

Alissa Zhu 3/21/2025 5:30 a.m. EDT [1 Comment](#)



A wellness suite at Basilica Place, a Catholic Charities Senior Community in Baltimore, where residents will soon be able to receive addiction treatment services from a nurse and peer recovery specialist. (Jessica Gallagher/The Baltimore Banner)

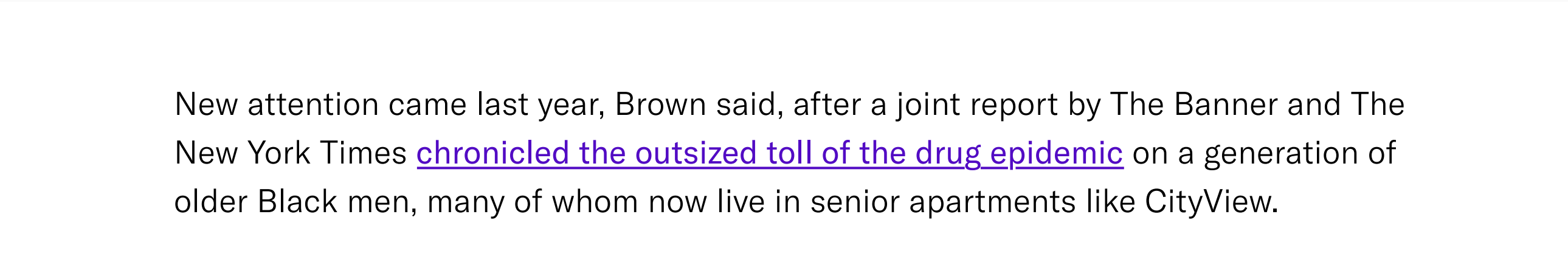
Hundreds have died in Baltimore's senior apartment buildings with little intervention. New efforts could stem the tide.

For years, Shanda Brown saw dozens of seniors die from drug use at the affordable housing complex where she worked in Baltimore's Upton neighborhood.

"We definitely felt like we were out there on our own," Brown said.

But now there's new focus on the overdose crisis devastating the city's older adults.

The Community Builders Inc., a nonprofit mixed-income housing developer, received a \$50,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Aging to help residents with addiction at the apartment complex, CityView at McCulloh Homes, said Brown, who directs regional community services for The Community Builders.



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New attention came last year, Brown said, after a joint report by The Banner and The New York Times [chronicled the outsized toll of the drug epidemic](#) on a generation of older Black men, many of whom now live in senior apartments like CityView.

Using autopsy data, the Banner found that more than half of the top addresses for fatal overdoses in the city were senior housing complexes. More than 340 people over the age of 50 have died in such buildings since 2018.

"I can't overstate how effective that article was in getting the attention we needed on this issue," Brown said, adding, "That was overdue."

Brown's team is now seeking additional funding so they can continue to provide residents with drug addiction recovery services and open a medical suite onsite.

There's movement at other buildings as well. This spring, community nonprofits and institutions are launching two more overdose prevention programs to serve six other senior apartment complexes in the city.

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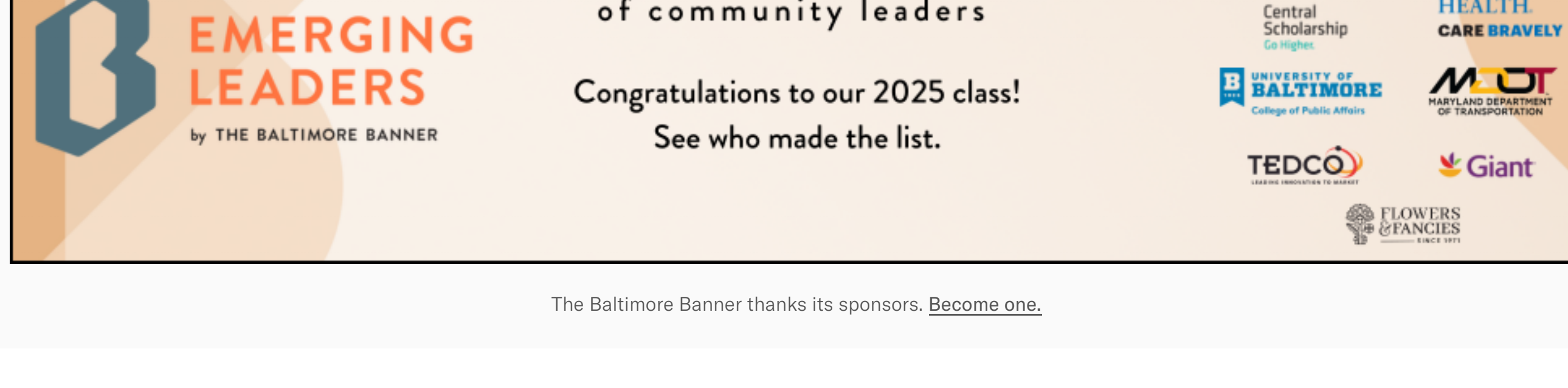
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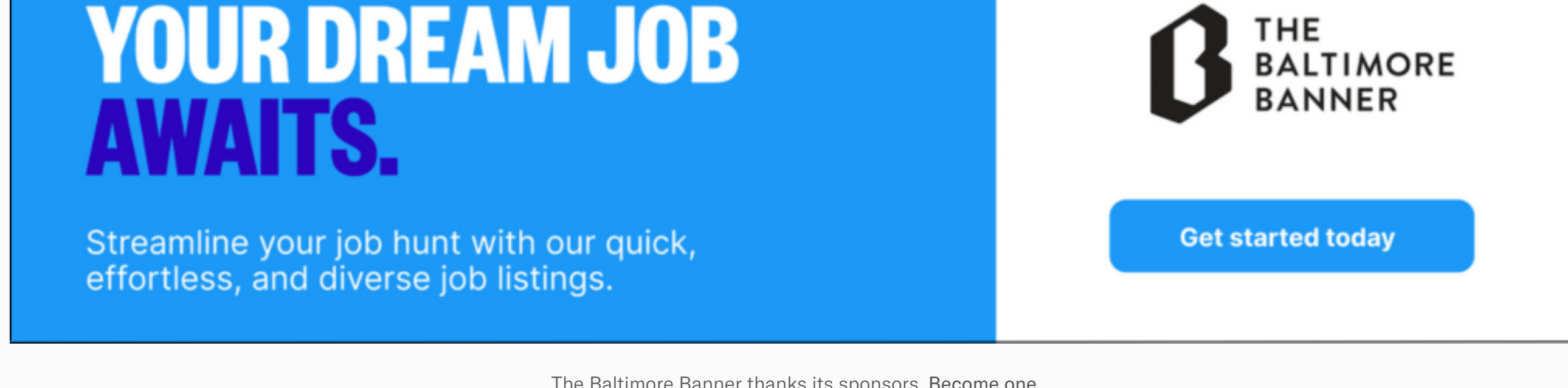
One program serving four West Baltimore buildings will train maintenance workers, security officers, property managers and other staff to respond to overdoses and deal with other drug use issues, said Allison Ciborowski, president and CEO of LeadingAge Maryland, an advocacy group representing nonprofit health care and housing organizations for seniors.

Naloxone, an overdose reversal drug, will also be available on every floor of the buildings. Staff members will assess the needs of individual residents to determine how best to serve them, she said.

"The goal, ultimately, is to reduce fatal overdoses in affordable senior housing," Ciborowski said.

The program is a \$553,000 partnership between LeadingAge Maryland, Baltimore nonprofit Civic Works and Grace Medical Center, funded by West Baltimore Renaissance Foundation. The foundation's executive director, Kurt Sommer, said the project started after its board saw the stories published by The Banner and The Times, and then met with affordable housing providers to discuss potential solutions.

LeadingAge Maryland declined at this time to say which properties are participating in the program, which will initially serve about 300 older adults. Ciborowski said she hopes it can expand to four additional buildings next year, eventually creating a model that can be replicated throughout the city.



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A separate program launching this spring will hire a nurse and peer recovery specialist to advise residents seeking addiction treatment and wanting to improve their social connections, according to Marik Moen, an associate professor at the University of Maryland School of Nursing.

Twice a week, the medical and recovery professionals will work out of Basilica Place, a 200-unit building in the Mount Vernon neighborhood, and MonteVerde Apartments, a 301-unit complex overlooking Druid Hill Park.

MonteVerde Apartments is one of a few senior apartment buildings that had already started to address overdoses among residents. Last year, Affordable Homes & Communities (AHC), the nonprofit that owns the building, converted a game room into offices for full-time addiction treatment specialists.



Basilica Place will soon receive more addiction support services for seniors. (Jessica Gallagher/The Baltimore Banner)

In a statement, Michelle Kells, health program manager of AHC Resident Services, said the organization is thrilled to partner with the University of Maryland School of Medicine, which is leading the new project. The school received nearly \$640,000 from Maryland's opioid restitution fund, the state [recently announced](#).

Four miles to the southeast of MonteVerde, the staff of Basilica Place will soon receive more addiction support services for seniors whose struggles with drug use became more visible during the COVID-19 lockdown, said Jill Kratz, who helps manage services for senior communities at Catholic Charities.

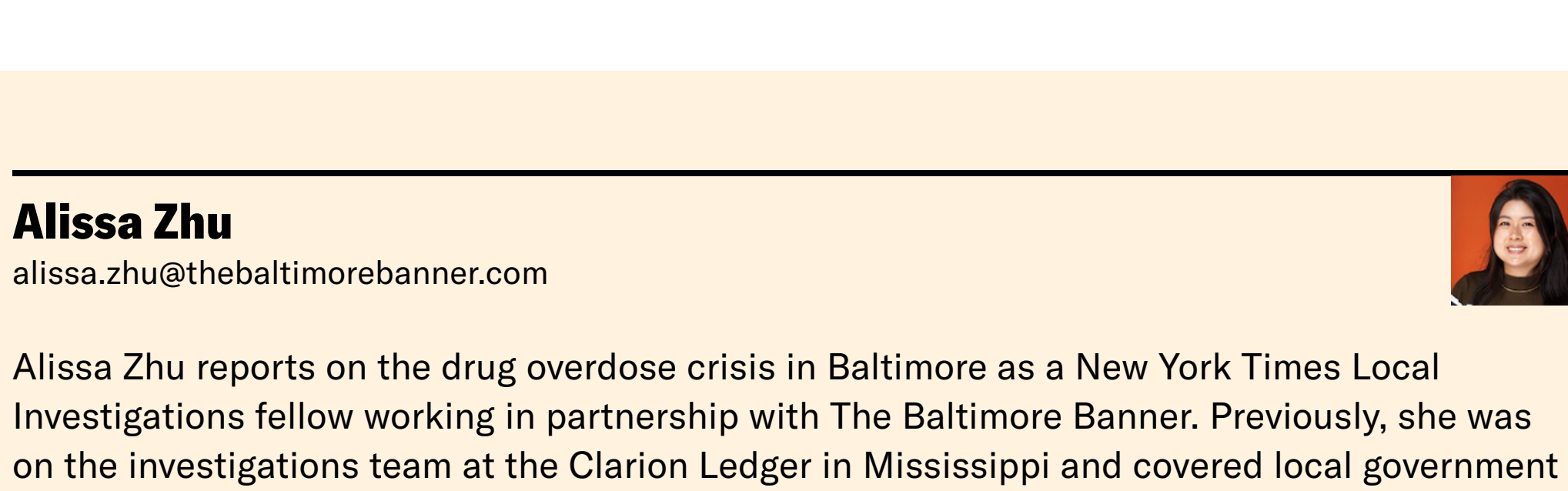


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The pace of overdose deaths in senior homes quickened during the pandemic when residents were isolated and illicit drugs were readily available. In 2023, 77 people died from overdoses in senior apartments, more than double the number from 2019, according to autopsy records obtained by The Banner.

Kratz credited the reporting for shining a new light on addiction among older city residents.

"It's nice to know this is getting some broader attention. Hopefully that means more support," she said.



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Alissa Zhu reports on the drug overdose crisis in Baltimore as a New York Times Local Investigations fellow working in partnership with The Baltimore Banner. Previously, she was on the investigations team at the Clarion Ledger in Mississippi and covered local government for the News-Leader in her hometown of Springfield, Missouri.

X

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[IS](#) Join the conversation, Isabella S.

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[JC](#) Jacqueline C. · 5 HRS AGO
This is an important 1st step and I hope it continues to get the attention & funding it needs. Baltimore Seniors caught in the throes of addiction need this kind of help desperately. They're the Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents that we need alive for the next generation of children can obtain whatever wisdom they have to be better than they have been.

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