

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT THE OPIOID CRISIS

Public Health Brief



Mallory Canami, Health Policy Analyst



WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

Harm Reduction is a set of strategies that meet people where they are in their drug use to improve health and quality of life outcomes. Services are provided with a nonjudgmental approach and continue to engage individuals regardless of their use status. Harm reduction acknowledges that abstaining from drug use is not realistic for everyone depending on their stage of recovery. However, it is possible to mitigate the damage associated with drug use through harm reduction programs.

The benefits of harm reduction strategies include:

- Reduced rates of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other infections
- Prevention of unintentional overdoses
- Navigation of clients to the appropriate recovery services

COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Policy makers throughout the country and the world have identified several key strategies to address the opioid crisis.

Community-based naloxone distribution: In an emergency situation, naloxone can be administered to quickly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

Syringe exchange programs: These programs offer sterile syringes to injection drug users, collect used syringes, and link clients to clinical and mental health services.

Safe injection facilities: At these designated sites people can legally use drugs under medical supervision to prevent overdose.

Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT): MAT is the use of medication, in combination with therapy, to treat substance use disorders (SUD).

HARFORD COUNTY 2017 DATA*

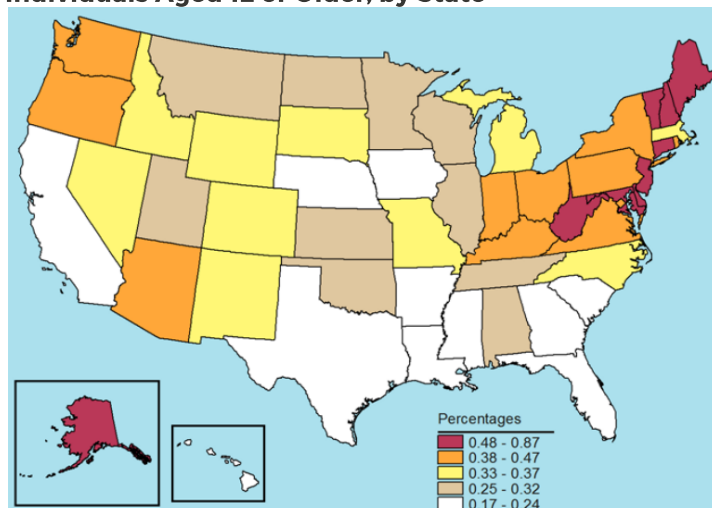
# of drug-related overdose deaths	101
# individuals trained on Naloxone use	1,716
# of health department SUD visits	5,729
# of Buprenorphine Physicians	40
# of Substance Abuse/Mental Health Providers	29

SPOTLIGHT: SCOTT COUNTY, INDIANA

In 2015 Scott County experienced a large-scale outbreak of HIV and Hepatitis C infections, a direct result of intravenous drug use that included sharing of contaminated injection supplies. The outbreak was so significant that Indiana's Governor declared a public health emergency, and the county started a syringe exchange program that drastically decreased new infections. A Centers for Disease Control study reported that an earlier public health response could have greatly reduced the total number of HIV infections*.

The map below shows heroin use by individuals aged 12 and older by state. Maryland and the neighboring states of West Virginia, Delaware, and New Jersey were all identified as having some of the country's highest use percentages. During that same period of time the Maryland Department of Health reported that 86% of overdose deaths in the state involved opioids. As a result of this opioid addiction epidemic, Governor Larry Hogan declared a state of emergency and developed policies and programs to address this crisis.

2015-2016 Percentage of Heroin Use in the Past Year among Individuals Aged 12 or Older, by State*



*Sources: 2017 Maryland Vital Statistics Administration, Unintentional Drug-and Alcohol-Related Intoxication Deaths Annual Report
 Consalves, G. S. (2018). Dynamics of the HIV outbreak and response in Scott County, IN, USA, 2011-15: A modelling study. doi:10.1016/s2352-3018(18)30176-0
 SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator
 SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, NSDUH, 2015 and 2016.