

Foundations of Harm Reduction

Fact Sheet

What is Harm Reduction?

Harm Reduction is:

- Incorporating a spectrum of strategies including safer techniques, managed use, and abstinence to promote the dignity and wellbeing of people who use drugs.
- A framework for understanding structural inequalities like poverty, racism, homophobia, classism, etc.
- Meeting people “where they are,” but not leaving them there.

We Use People First Language:

- A person is a person first, and a behavior is something that can change — terms like “drug addict” or “user” imply someone is “something” instead of someone.
- Stigma is a barrier to care and we want people to feel comfortable when accessing services.
- People are more than their drug use and harm reduction focuses on the whole person.

Why Harm Reduction Works

- Provides a space for people to be open about their drug use so it’s not hidden, perpetuating feelings of isolation.
- It is rooted in evidence-based practices that have shown decreases in health and social harms.
- Keeps individuals engaged in care if they re-engage risk at any stage.
- Reduces overdose deaths
- Prevents disease transmission
- Reduces stigma

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Key Harm Reduction Tools and Approaches Include:

- **Naloxone:** A medication that can reverse opioid overdose and is crucial for preventing overdose deaths.
- **Syringe services programs (SSPs):** Also known as needle exchange programs, SSPs provide sterile injection equipment and safe disposal for used needles, reducing the transmission of HIV and hepatitis C, notes the CDC.
- **Fentanyl and Xylazine test strips:** Helps individuals identify the presence of these potent substances in drugs, which can be crucial for overdose prevention.
- **Safer consumption spaces (Overdose Prevention Sites):** Medically supervised facilities where people can use drugs in a safer environment and access resources, according to the Drug Policy Alliance.
- **Education on safer drug use practices:** Includes information on reducing risks associated with various modes of consumption (e.g., injecting, smoking, snorting).
- **Wound care and infection prevention supplies:** Supports hygiene and reduces the risk of infections related to drug use.
- **Safer smoking kits:** Provides equipment to reduce infectious disease transmission among people who smoke drugs.
- **Linkages to care:** Connecting people who use drugs to various health and social services.

