

Overdose Prevention

Reducing deaths from overdose through a public health approach



There is an overdose epidemic in the United States.

More than 93,000 people died of drug overdoses in 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a single year in the United States. Every overdose death is preventable.

Vital Strategies partners with governments, providers and communities to support health-centered solutions rooted in evidence.

Focus States



Technical Intervention Package for Overdose Prevention

Vital Strategies is working to establish effective policy and program models that can be adapted and implemented across the country.



Medications

Expand medication access and availability

1. Maximize training and dispensing of the opioid overdose antidote, naloxone
2. Expand opioid agonist treatment, such as methadone and buprenorphine



Communities

Reduce stigma, increase public awareness, strengthen community-based services and support people who use drugs

3. Establish low-threshold 24-hour drop-in/off centers in high-need areas with a comprehensive array of supports
4. Enhance care coordination and case management across health and social service settings
5. Authorize and expand syringe access services
6. Conduct mass media campaigns to improve public understanding and engagement, reduce stigma, and increase access to resources
7. Engage and mobilize communities to address drug overdose



Support, Don't Punish

Transform the response to drug use from a criminal and moral problem to a health issue

8. Offer alternatives to arrest for drug-related charges
9. Prevent and/or eliminate health and social penalties for drug use



Data

Use data to inform policy and response

10. Establish local multisectoral data-driven collaboratives and statewide data hubs
11. Leverage prescription drug monitoring programs as a tool for public health surveillance and to guide provider support

Overdose and drug use touch multiple systems and sectors from public health to criminal justice, social services, health care, and others. Progress will require leadership across all sectors, and must include people who use drugs as well as their families and friends. Vital Strategies' approach is multidisciplinary, inclusive, and highly responsive to local conditions.

Addressing populations who have been historically disadvantaged and marginalized, including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, requires a special commitment to racial equity. It is important to address how people of color experience the collateral consequences of drug use criminalization, including mass incarceration and surveillance, loss of eligibility for public housing and public assistance, poor access to medications, and punitive policies and practices related to child welfare, parole and probation. Progress will require an approach grounded in racial equity.

Funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, Vital Strategies is a leading technical and implementation partner of the Overdose Prevention program.

Established to tackle the epidemic in the United States, the program is bringing a comprehensive approach to reduce overdose deaths in Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania where fatalities are the highest in the country.

Our Partners

- The Pew Charitable Trusts
- Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
- CDC Foundation