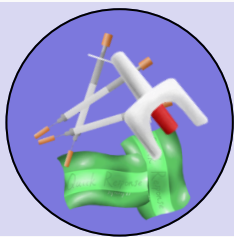


Harm Reduction in Pennsylvania: Policies, Needs, and Services



PA State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup 2024



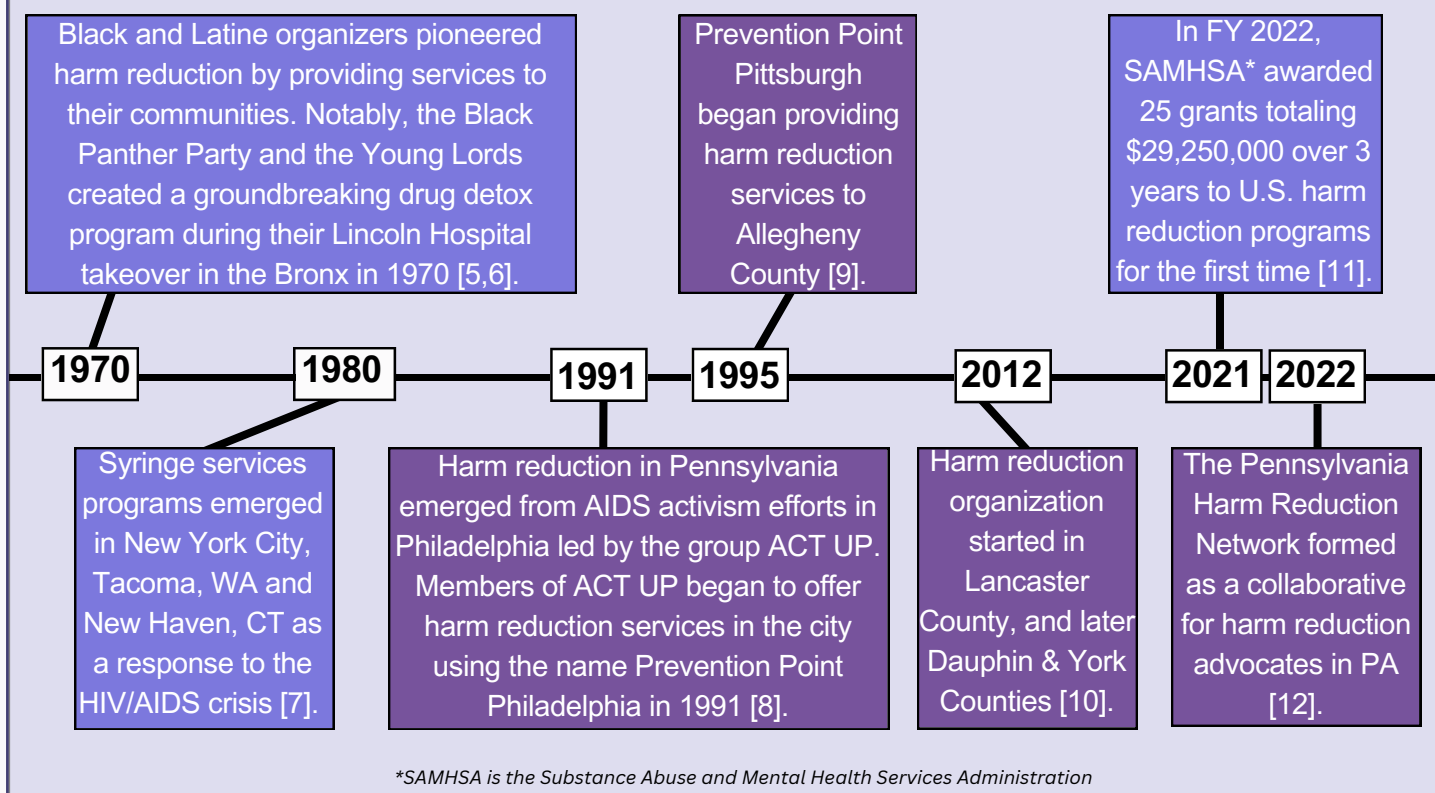
Harm Reduction in Pennsylvania

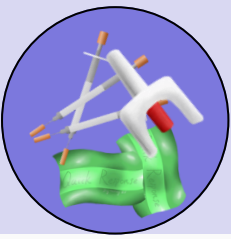
Background

According to the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, “harm reduction is an approach that emphasizes working directly with people who use drugs (PWUD) to prevent overdose and infectious disease transmission, improve the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of those served, and offer low-threshold options for accessing substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and other health care services” [1]. Core harm reduction services include but are not limited to outreach and education, syringe services programs, HIV/HCV/STI testing, and overdose prevention [2,3,4].

The first harm reduction programs in the U.S. emerged from Black- and Latine-led community organizations in the 1960s and 70s in New York as mutual aid and innovative drug detoxification programs [5,6]. During the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, activists and persons who used drugs started peer-led syringe services programs aiming to reduce HIV transmission among people who injected drugs [7]. While syringe services programs remain criminalized in Pennsylvania, the state’s first program was started by AIDS activists in Philadelphia in 1991, and a city ordinance was passed in 1992 to authorize its operation [8]. Since then, the landscape of harm reduction in the state has evolved. **However, there has been no assessment documenting the scope of harm reduction services in the Commonwealth,** along with the associated needs and policies. This report will focus on three key components of harm reduction in Pennsylvania: **syringe services, overdose prevention, and drug checking.**

A timeline of harm reduction in the United States and Pennsylvania





Drug Use in Pennsylvania

Drug use disorder across Pennsylvania counties

Harm reduction services were initially directed toward people who inject drugs, but today, programs mitigate the risks of all types of drug use. Pennsylvania combines CDC vital statistics mortality weights with state estimates of illicit drug use from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health to calculate estimates for "drug use disorder." In 2020, 16 out of 67 counties (24%) in Pennsylvania had rates of drug use disorder higher than the statewide average of 2.3% among people aged 12 and older (Figure 1). The Pennsylvania Department of Health also uses the estimate for drug use disorder as a proxy for opioid use disorder [13].

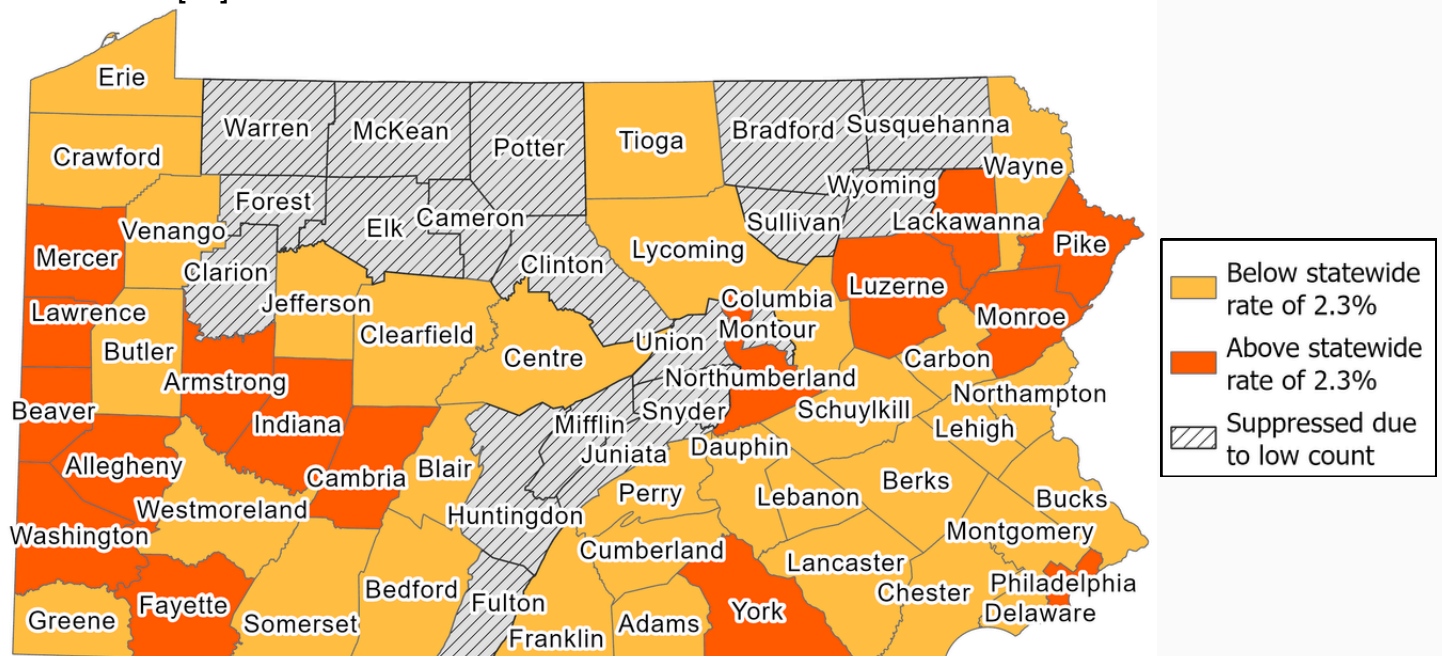


Figure 1. Estimated prevalence of drug use disorder among people aged 12+ in PA counties, 2020

Source: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania [13]

Injection drug use among adults and youth in the U.S. and Pennsylvania

- In the U.S. in 2021, 2.02% of people aged 12 and older (5,748,000 [14] of 284,591,408 [15]) were estimated to inject drugs in their lifetime.
- In Pennsylvania, in 2018-2019 (the most recent data available), 2% (215,000) of residents aged 12 and older were estimated to inject drugs in their lifetime [16].
- Injection drug use among high school students has declined from 2.3% to 1.4% between 2011-2021 in the U.S. and from 1.3% to 0.9% between 2015-2021 in PA. However, in large cities such as Philadelphia and New York, the rates were consistently higher during 2011-2021 (Figure 2).

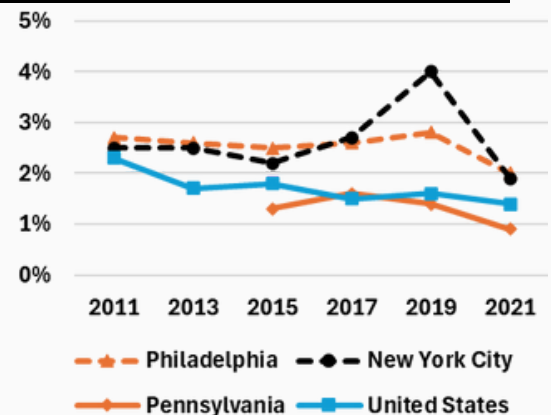
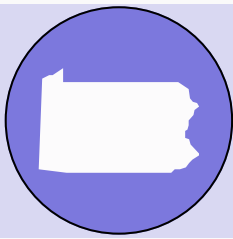


Figure 2. Injection drug use among high school youth in the U.S., Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and New York City

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System [17]
Note: Data were not collected for the state of Pennsylvania prior to 2015, and data are reported for every other year. Local data sourced from school districts.



Harm Reduction Services in Pennsylvania

3

Scope of harm reduction services in Pennsylvania

The scope of harm reduction services in Pennsylvania varies by county. All Pennsylvanians can get naloxone—a medication used to reverse opioid overdoses—without a prescription (see page 10). Each county offers naloxone through local initiatives, but the scope and availability of additional harm reduction services varies across the state. Only 9 counties (13%) offer syringe services, test strip distribution, harm reduction education, and naloxone. Most counties offer more limited services: 43 counties (64%) provide test strips, education, and naloxone, 7 counties (11%) provide naloxone and test strips, 4 counties (6%) offer naloxone and education, and 4 counties (6%) only offer naloxone.

This analysis does not depict the accessibility, the number of harm reduction programs, or coverage of these services within each county, merely whether such programs exist.

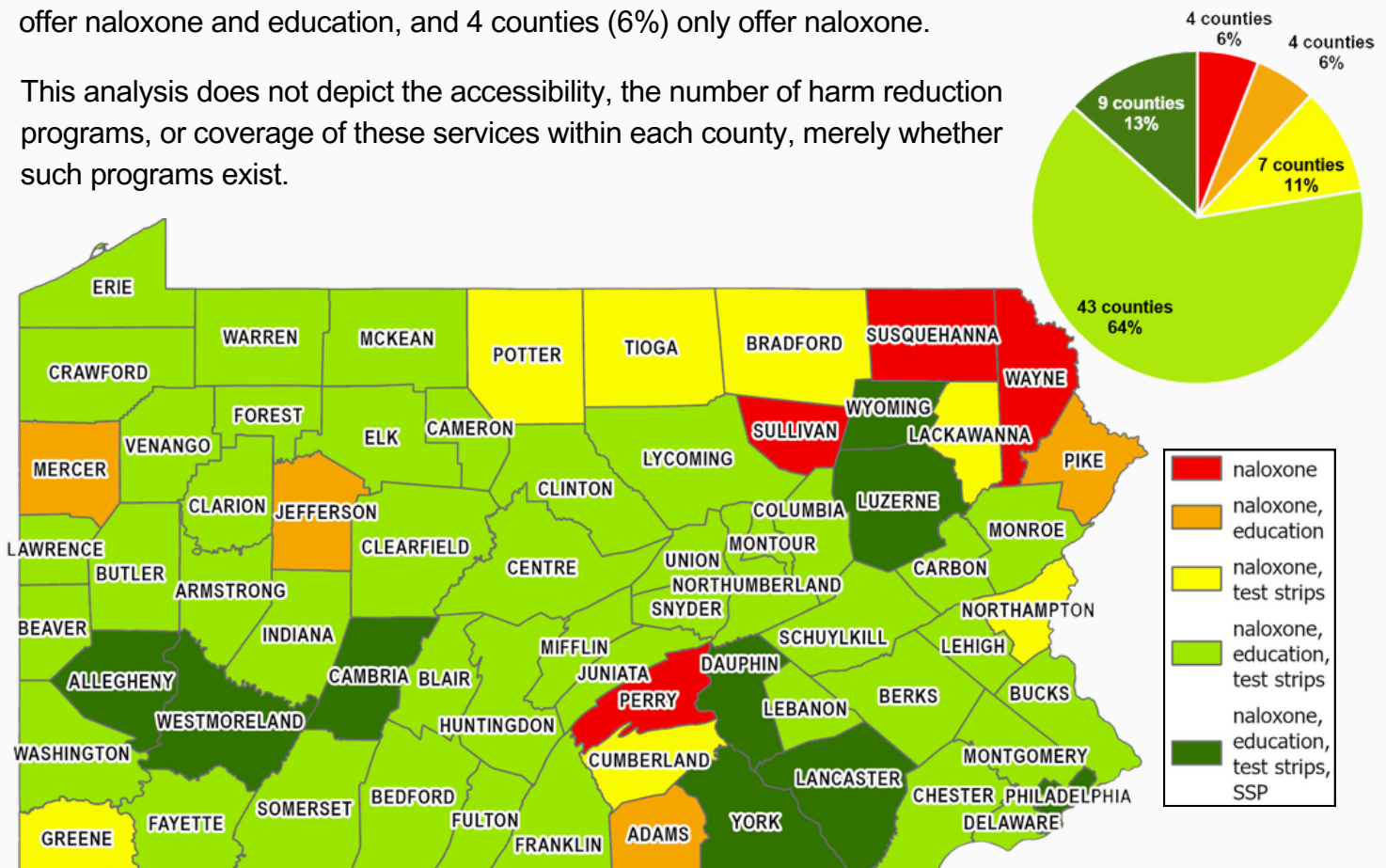


Figure 3. Availability and types of harm reduction services in Pennsylvania, 2024

Source: Naloxone and test strips were mapped from the Single County Authority (SCA) survey (see description below) and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency data [18]. Education was mapped from the SCA survey. Syringe services programs (SSPs) were mapped from the SCA survey, harm reduction organizations' websites, and online news sources.

Single County Authority Survey

A survey on the scope of harm reduction services in Pennsylvania was developed and administered by Drexel University on behalf of the PA State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup. Conducted between January and February 2024, the survey was electronically distributed to all 47 PA Single County Authorities (SCA). Questions asked about direct and externally provided harm reduction services, with a focus on harm reduction education, naloxone trainings and distribution, and test strip distribution. Additionally, SCA were asked about syringe services programs operating within their communities. All 47 SCA consented and responded to the survey, and data was finalized following additional follow-ups with SCA as necessary. Several SCA represent multiple counties, therefore the survey sample (n=47) is not equal to the total number of PA counties (n=67).



Spotlight: Prevention Point Philadelphia

The organization

Prevention Point Philadelphia (PPP) is a Philadelphia-based, nationally-recognized harm reduction organization that serves thousands of people experiencing houselessness and/or substance use disorders. Prevention Point Philadelphia's syringe services program has been operating since 1991. As of 2024, Prevention Point Philadelphia has become a hub for essential harm reduction supplies, medical care, and social services [8].

"I am here today because of the efforts of Prevention Point. I know when I was homeless I was a difficult person to [...] know and work with. Prevention Point supported me despite of myself. Because of that attitude, I'm here today. My life had value then. My life has value now."

- PPP participant [19]

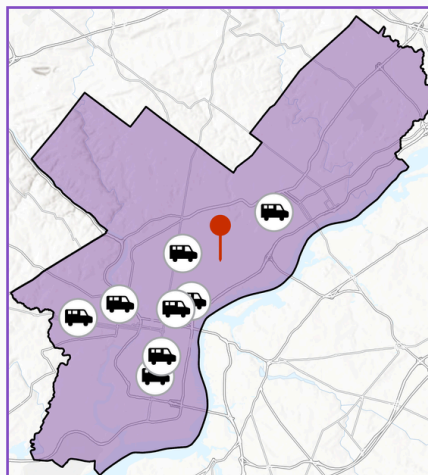
Outcomes between July 1st, 2022 and June 30th, 2023



Copyright: Jeffery Holder

Syringe services program volunteers counting and preparing syringes for distribution

Served 30,247 people through the syringe services program, including both stationary and mobile van services.



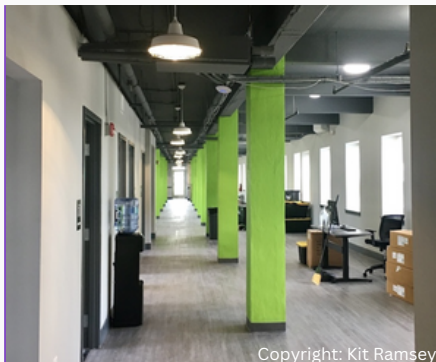
Prevention Point Philadelphia is located in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia. The organization also offers mobile services across other Philadelphia neighborhoods.



Copyright: Kit Ramsey

Drop in center staff prepares coffee for participants

Facilitated 52,280 public bathroom visits (to prevent hepatitis A), distributed 16,902 free meals, and operated 6,204 mailboxes for unhoused participants.



Copyright: Kit Ramsey

One of three floors in Beacon House--a PPP emergency transitional shelter that houses 60+ residents at a time, many of whom have opioid use disorder.

Provided emergency shelter to 171 people and transitioned 56 people into permanent housing.



Copyright: Hilary Disch

Opioid overdose reversal kits given out by PPP. Contains two doses of Narcan, gloves, a breathing guard, and an overdose reversal instruction sheet.

Gave ~1,300 overdose trainings and distributed 95,644 doses of naloxone.



Copyright: Francis Young

Wound care supplies for caring for injection-related wounds

Provided 1,103 wound care visits, enrolled 357 new participants in medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder, and distributed 516 PrEP prescriptions.



Spotlight: Prevention Point Pittsburgh

The organization

Prevention Point Pittsburgh was founded in 1995 to respond to harms associated with drug use and HIV/AIDS in the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 2002, the organization was authorized to deliver syringe services programs by Allegheny County. In addition to syringe services, they offer other safe use supplies, naloxone distribution and training, medical care, and case management services. They also monitor and notify people who use drugs about dangerous drug samples in the local supply. Prevention Point Pittsburgh is headquartered in the North Oakland neighborhood of the city, runs mobile services in four other Pittsburgh neighborhoods, and has a brick and mortar site in East Liberty every Sunday [9].

"People make all these assumptions about people who use drugs, that they don't care about themselves. Nobody's trying to die from using drugs. You have to push back at people and remind them that everyone deserves to be healthy and safe."

*-PP Pittsburgh Executive Director
Aaron Arnold [20]*

Outcomes in 2022 reporting year



Copyright: Prevention Point Pittsburgh
Prevention Point Pittsburgh Executive Director Aaron Arnold displays sterile syringes in one of their mobile vans

Prevention Point Pittsburgh's syringe services program served 4,406 people in 2022. They provide sterile injection, smoking, and snorting supplies, as well as medical care, connections to food and shelter, and opportunities to meet with social workers and physicians.



Prevention Point Pittsburgh serves the Pittsburgh area from the North Oakland neighborhood. The organization also operates four mobile services (vans) in other parts of the city and Allegheny County.



Copyright: Prevention Point Pittsburgh
Overdose Prevention Project Director Alice Bell on PPP's mobile syringe services van.

Prevention Point Pittsburgh's overdose prevention education/reversal program distributed 10,885 naloxone doses (+33,504 in partnership with NEXT Distro) and reported 844 overdose reversals (+341 in partnership with NEXT Distro).



Copyright: Prevention Point Pittsburgh
Administrative coordinator, Katie Houston, offering naloxone training and harm reduction education & materials at an outreach event.



Spotlight: Lancaster, Harrisburg, and York Harm Reduction Projects

The organization

The Lancaster Harm Reduction Project (LHRP) began delivering services in Lancaster County in 2012. LHRP expanded in later years to operate in Dauphin County in 2014 and the City of York in 2016. The LHRP's mission focuses on providing non-judgmental harm reduction services to all in need. The organization distributes naloxone, fentanyl test strips, wound care kits, safe disposal containers, and provides health screenings [10].

"You make a difference on the streets, helping us with clean works...other places don't do that. You care, and that's a rare feeling anymore."

-Participant at LHRP

[Testimony provided by LHRP staff]

Outcomes from November 2021 through October 2022



LHRP provides various medical services. The organization performed 172 HIV/HCV/ STI screenings and referrals, and distributed 992 wound care kits.



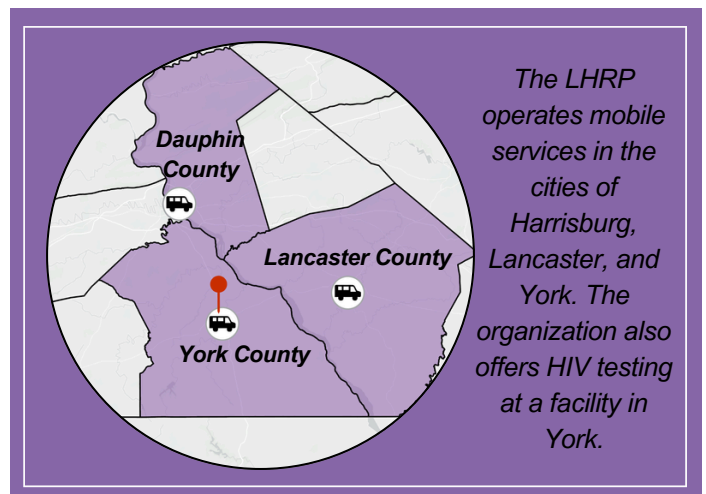
Harm reduction supplies for distribution, including fentanyl test strips, condoms, masks, and hygiene kits.

The LHRP distributed 1,279 naloxone kits and 1,140 fentanyl test strips and provided overdose prevention education.

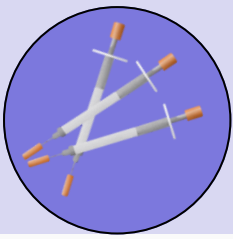


LHRP staff

Combined, the Lancaster, York, and Dauphin Harm Reduction Projects made contact with 13,019 service recipients.



The LHRP operates mobile services in the cities of Harrisburg, Lancaster, and York. The organization also offers HIV testing at a facility in York.



Syringe Services Programs

Syringe services programs in Pennsylvania

Syringe services programs (SSPs) distribute sterile drug use equipment, safely dispose of used syringes, and link participants to medical and social services, including drug treatment services.

As of 2024, syringe services programs operate in nine Pennsylvania counties (Figure 3). Most SSPs distribute resources in a variety of settings, including via health centers, mobile units, or street-based outreach (Figure 4).

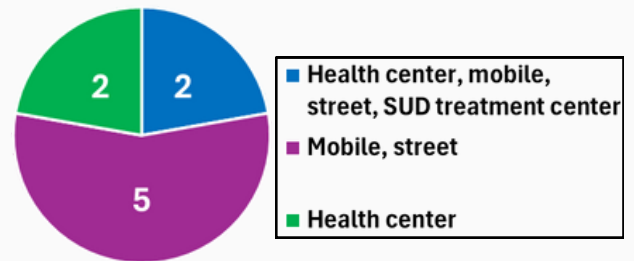


Figure 4: Channels of service delivery among PA syringe services programs, n=9

Source: Single County Authority survey (see p. 3), harm reduction organizations' websites, online news sources

Studies found that participation in SSPs is associated with multiple public health benefits, including:

Reduced risky injection behaviors

SSPs facilitate long-term reduction in reusing needles and sharing needles and paraphernalia with others [21].

Reduced syringe litter

A study in Miami found a 49% decrease in improperly discarded syringes after SSP implementation [22].

Reduced HIV/HCV transmission

SSPs are associated with a reduction in HIV transmission [23]. High SSP coverage in Europe is linked with a 56% reduction in HCV acquisition risk [24].

Increased access to addiction treatment

New users of SSPs are 5x more likely to enter drug treatment than those who never used SSPs [25].

National Opioid Settlement and Syringe Services Programs

- The opioid settlement follows lawsuits by states against major prescription drug businesses that contributed to the opioid crisis [26].
- States and localities can prioritize their opioid abatement strategies as long as they are among those listed in Exhibit E of the settlement agreements [27].
- Schedule A of Exhibit E (core strategies) identifies syringe service programs as one of nine high-priority actions for addressing the opioid crisis.
- Schedule B of Exhibit E (all approved uses) supports "syringe service programs and other evidence-informed programs to reduce harms associated with intravenous drug use, including supplies, staffing, space, peer support services, referrals to treatment, fentanyl checking, connections to care, and the full range of harm reduction and treatment services provided by these programs" [27].

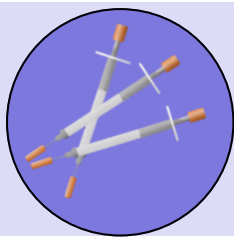
Are PA counties spending opioid settlement money on syringe services programs?

Allegheny County is the only county in the state that explicitly uses settlement money to fund SSPs. \$325,000 was allocated to Prevention Point Pittsburgh to support SSPs, HIV/HCV testing & treatment, and mobile harm reduction services [28].

A Westmoreland County harm reduction organization was allocated \$160,000 to hire recovery specialists and fund other expenses. Funding was canceled when it became known that they also offered an SSP, even though none of the funds would be used for syringes [28].

In Philadelphia County in March 2024, Mayor Cherelle Parker's administration announced that they would not spend any of Philadelphia's settlement money (\$180 million) on services that provide safe use equipment [29].

Lancaster County commissioners decided not to fund syringe service programs with settlement money in August 2024. SSPs faced criticism as a harm reduction practice [28].



Syringe Services Programs: HIV & Hepatitis C Prevention

Syringe services programs (SSPs) prevent HIV infections in people who inject drugs

- In Pennsylvania, between 1991-2000 and 2011-2021, the share of HIV cases due to injection drug use has dropped from 34% to 7% (Figure 5).
 - In 2021, just over 1 in 15 HIV cases in PA were attributed to injection drug use [30].
- A 2019 study estimated that **an SSP in Philadelphia prevented 10,592 new HIV cases** among people who inject drugs – or 68% of the estimated new cases had there not been an SSP – between 1993 and 2002 [31].

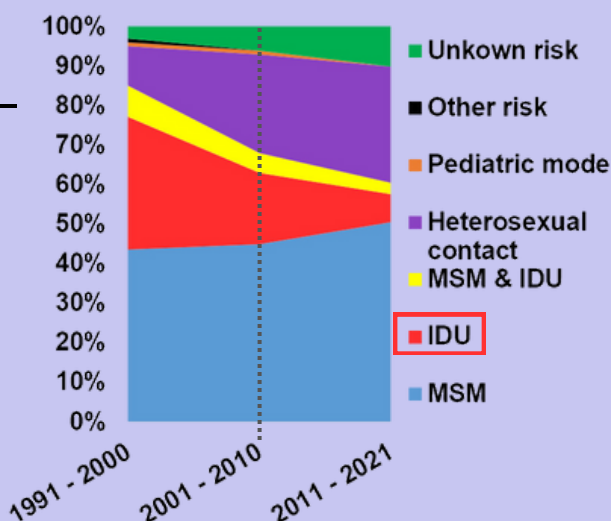


Figure 5. Share of HIV cases by the mode of transmission in Pennsylvania during 1991-2000, 2001-2010, and 2011-2021

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Health [30]

Note: IDU = injection drug use; MSM = men who have sex with men

Pennsylvania counties with active SSPs have lower rates of incident HCV

People who inject drugs are at risk of contracting Hepatitis C (HCV) through sharing or reusing syringes that may be contaminated with the virus [32]. In 2020, 66% of new HCV cases in the U.S. were attributed to injection drug use [33]. Among people aged 15-39 estimated to have a drug use disorder in PA in 2020, 28.6 per 1,000 people were diagnosed with a new HCV infection [34]. In Pennsylvania in 2020, no counties with SSPs fell into the highest quantile of HCV incidence (Figure 6).

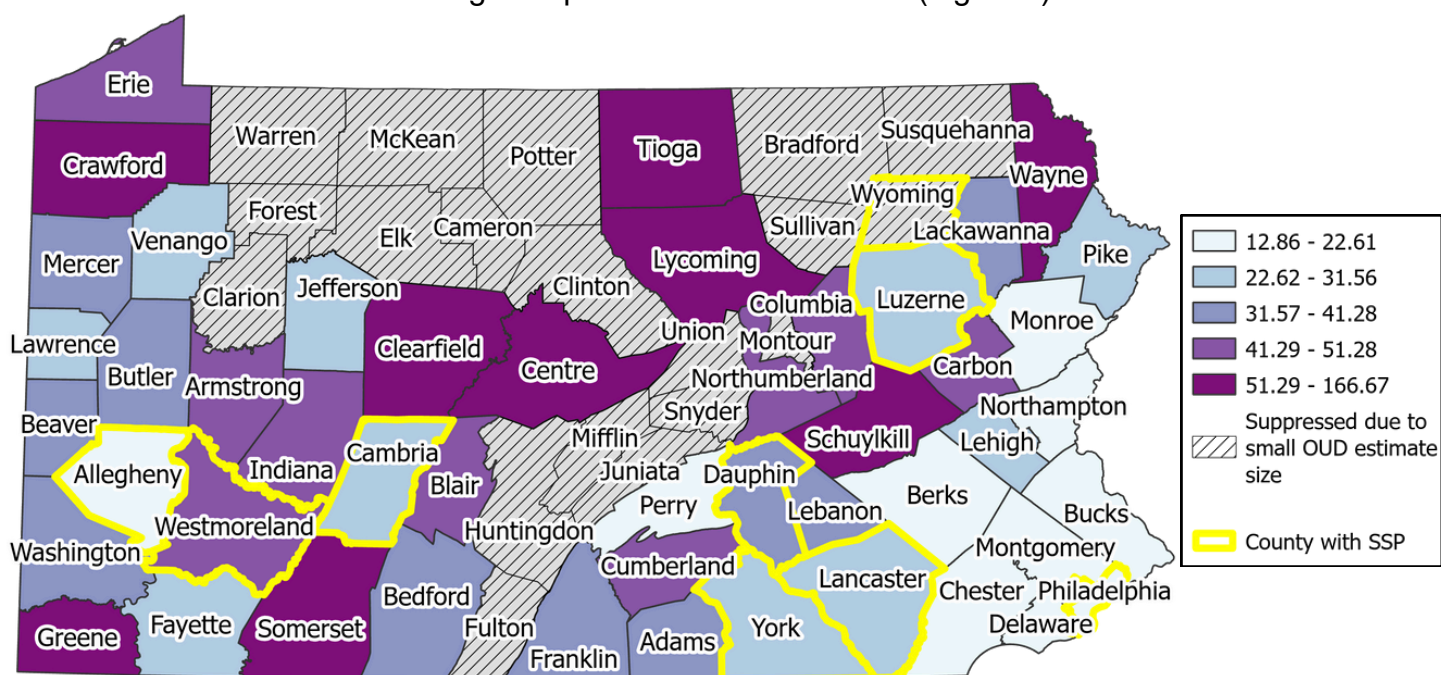
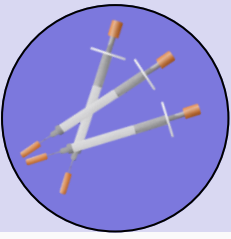


Figure 6. Hepatitis C incidence (ages 15-39) per 1,000 people estimated to have drug use disorder, by the presence of syringe services programs (SSP) in PA counties, 2020

Source: HCV data from Pennsylvania Department of Health [34], SSP data - see Figure 3.



Syringe Policy

Syringe services program policy in the United States

- Over 400 syringe services programs (SSPs) operate in the U.S. and are registered with the North American Syringe Exchange Network [35].
- **12 states, including Pennsylvania, explicitly criminalize syringe possession** and, consequently, SSP operation (Figure 7).
- 4 states--Iowa, Missouri, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania--have pending legislation to authorize SSP operation [36-39].
- Syringe services program expansion is among the core opioid abatement strategies recommended for state and local opioid settlement fund spending (see p.7).
- Though federal funding can be used to operate SSPs, it cannot pay for syringes themselves [40].

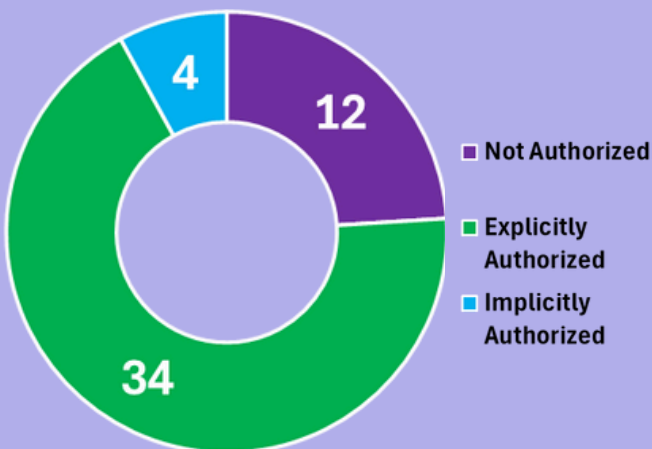


Figure 7. Legal status of syringe possession across 50 U.S. states, 2023

Source: Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association [41]

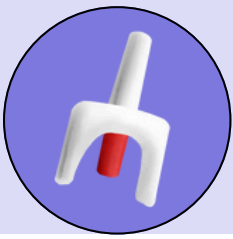
Syringe services program policy in Pennsylvania

- It is considered a misdemeanor crime to distribute drug paraphernalia in PA [42].
- Philadelphia and Allegheny counties have had local authorizations permitting SSP operation since 1992 and 2002, respectively [43,44].



Under Review: PA House Bill 1245

- In the 2023 - 2024 legislative session, **House Bill 1245 was proposed to legalize SSPs throughout the state.** The bill would update Pennsylvania's drug paraphernalia law to exclude syringes. It would also require SSP to provide disposal sites for syringes, information about treatment, and access to medication-assisted treatment [39].
- The House Judiciary Committee voted to pass the bill 15-10 on February 14, 2024 [45].
- Over 180 entities have signed on in support of SSP legalization in PA [46].
- Governor Shapiro's administration "supports expanding syringe services 'when administered correctly' and encourages 'the General Assembly to pass any legislation that would ultimately increase access to these harm reduction tools in Pennsylvania'" [47].



Overdose Rates & Disparities

Preventing fatal and nonfatal overdose is a key objective for harm reduction. Strategies for achieving this goal include naloxone distribution, drug checking, and offering trainings to first responders and community members. Naloxone is an opioid antagonist used to reverse opioid overdoses [48].

Overdose-related policies

The **Pennsylvania Overdose Prevention Program (POPP)** was launched in 2017 and expanded in 2023. POPP is led by the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs and provides free naloxone and fentanyl & xylazine testing strips statewide [49].

Pennsylvania's **Good Samaritan policy** grants immunity for some controlled substance violations to persons who call emergency services to report an overdose. This policy is designed to promote seeking medical attention and prevent avoiding calling 911 out of fear of arrest [50].

In March 2023, the FDA approved Narcan (nasal spray version of naloxone) for over-the-counter, nonprescription use [51]. Expanding access to naloxone is one of nine core strategies for spending of the opioid settlement funds listed in Exhibit E [27].

Recent trends in overdose deaths in Pennsylvania

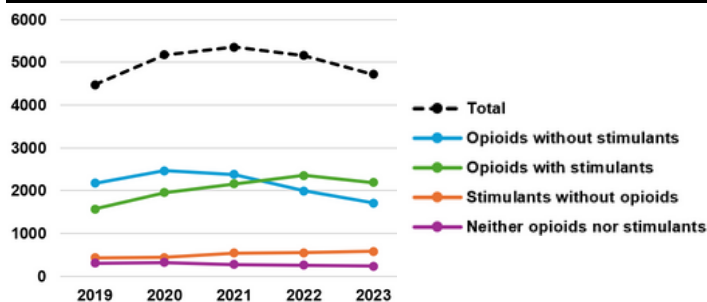


Figure 8. Fatal overdoses attributed to opioids and stimulants in Pennsylvania, 2019-2023

Source: ODSMP [52]

- Between 2022 and 2023, the total number of fatal overdoses in Pennsylvania decreased by 8.5%, from 5,158 in 2022 to 4,717 in 2023 [52].
- From 2019 to 2023, the share of overdose deaths due to the co-involvement of opioids and stimulants increased by 39.6%, from 1,570 to 2,192. The share of overdose deaths due to opioids without stimulants decreased by 20%, from 2,177 to 1,720 (Figure 8).
- Between 2019-2022, the number of overdose deaths from injection decreased from 1,198 to 866, while overdose deaths attributed to other routes of drug administration, particularly smoking, increased (Figure 9). Harm reduction programs provide information about snorting and smoking as safer alternatives to reduce overdose deaths related to injection.

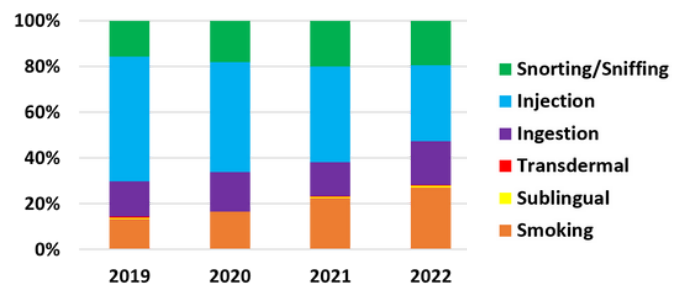


Figure 9. Share of overdose deaths by the route of drug administration, Pennsylvania, 2019-2022

Source: ODSMP [53]

Note: Sample sizes between 2019-2022 were 54, 51, 51, and 55 counties, respectively.

Black Pennsylvanians bear a disproportionate burden of overdose deaths

While Black Pennsylvanians constitute 12.3% of the total population, they experienced **25.6%** of all overdose deaths in 2023.

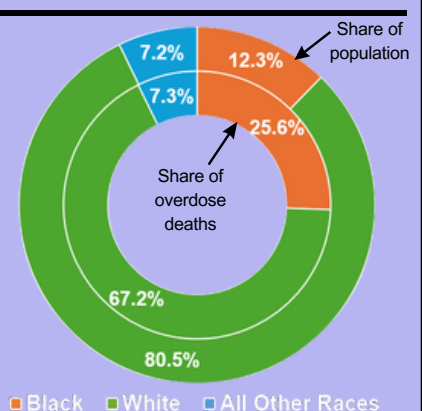
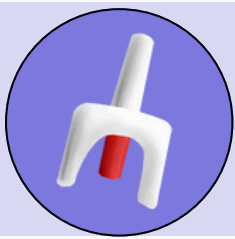


Figure 10. Proportion of the total population and overdose deaths in Pennsylvania by race, 2023

Source: ODSMP [52]



Overdose Prevention Services

Overdose rescues by first responders

The PA Overdose Information Network (ODIN) gathers data on fatal and nonfatal overdoses voluntarily reported by first responders, including those from PA criminal justice agencies, EMS, fire, medical personnel, and others. Due to volunteer reporting, only a fraction of rescues get reported. Between 2018-2023, reported rescues increased by 38.7%, with a consistent majority of successful outcomes each year (Figure 11). The percentage of overdose rescues involving naloxone administration decreased from 69.5% in 2018 to 61.0% in 2023. This decline may reflect an increase in overdose deaths involving stimulants and adulterants that do not respond to naloxone (Figure 8).

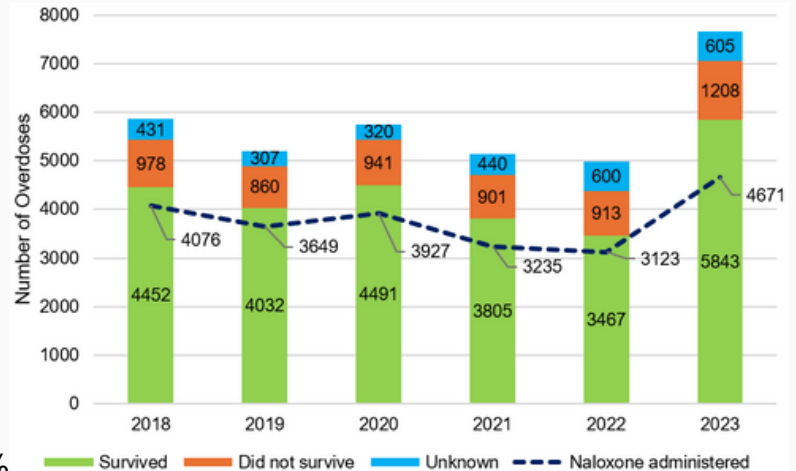


Figure 11. Overdose reversal outcomes voluntarily reported by first responders in Pennsylvania, 2019-2023

Source: Pennsylvania State Police: Overdose Information Network [54]

Overdose prevention services in Pennsylvania counties

The SCA survey indicated that all Single County Authorities were engaged in naloxone procurement and distribution over the past 12 months. The primary distribution channels were individual request (89%) and group trainings or other events (83%) (Figure 12). Among Single County Authorities who answered the procurement or distribution prompts, the most common range of naloxone doses per SCA was 100-999 (Figure 13).

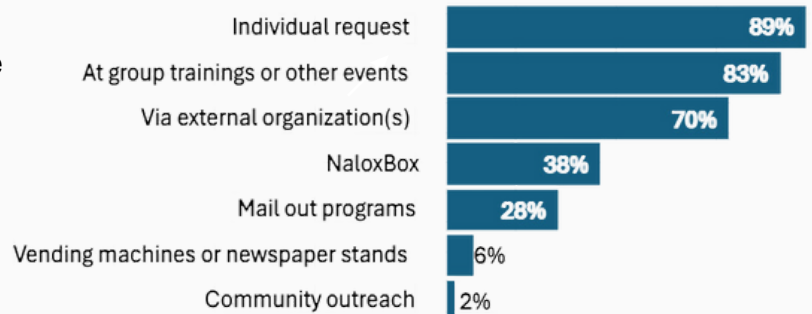


Figure 12. Channels of naloxone distribution over the past 12 months reported by Single County Authorities in PA (N=47)

Source: Single County Authority survey

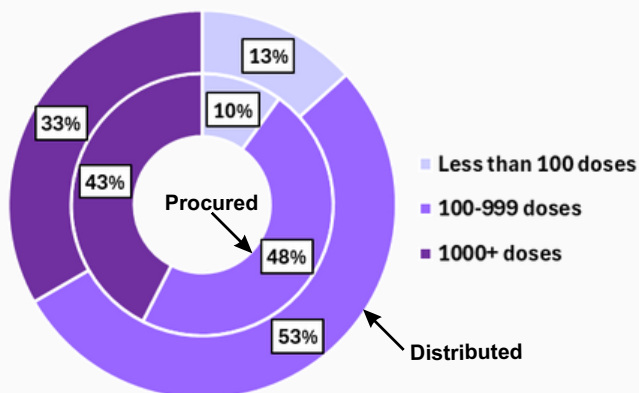


Figure 13. Estimated doses of procured and distributed naloxone over the past 12 months reported by Single County Authorities in PA

Source: Single County Authority survey

Vending machines

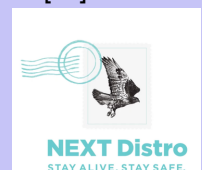
with free naloxone and harm reduction supplies operate in Philadelphia County (1), Allegheny (7), Berks (1), Clarion (1), Erie (1), Armstrong (2), Franklin (3), and Indiana (3) [55-61].



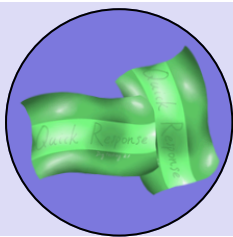
Copyright: Ari Trey-Masters

NEXT Distro

is an online and mail-based harm reduction service. They will mail naloxone to anyone in Pennsylvania upon request [62].



Copyright: NEXT Distro [60]



Drug Supply Adulteration & Drug Checking

Drug supply adulteration

The street drug supply is frequently adulterated or contaminated with various drugs and other substances. Consequently, people who use street drugs do not reliably know what is in the drugs they purchase and consume. Adulteration and unintentional polysubstance use are associated with overdoses and adverse outcomes such as central nervous system problems, kidney and liver damage, and seizures [63,64]. Fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid, and xylazine, a non-opiate sedative, are increasingly used as adulterants and detected in overdoses in Pennsylvania [52].

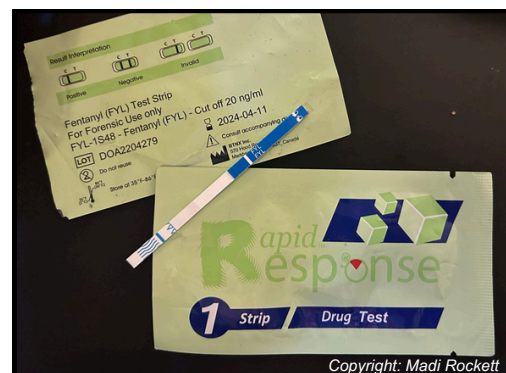
76% In 2023, 76.4% of fatal overdoses in PA involved fentanyl [52].

15x There was a nearly 15-fold increase in xylazine-involved overdoses in PA from 2018-2022 [52].

91% In Philadelphia, 91% of heroin samples contained both fentanyl and xylazine in the third quarter of 2022 [65].

Drug checking & drug test strips

Drug checking is a harm reduction practice that involves testing drugs for adulterants or other substances [66]. Test strips are most commonly used for this purpose; they can be submerged in drug solutions to detect the presence of fentanyl, xylazine, or other substances [67]. Although test strips cannot measure the quantity of adulterants or identify all substances, they are affordable and provide quick results. Studies show that using fentanyl test strips encourages safer drug use practices, such as using smaller doses and avoiding solitary use, among people who use drugs [68,69].



Fentanyl test strip

Drug checking equipment policy in the U.S. and Pennsylvania

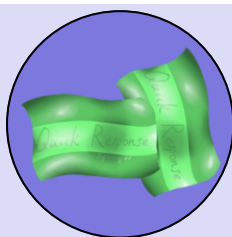
Possession

- Legal in 27 states
- Illegal in 7 states
- Varying legality in 19 states

Distribution

- Legal in 23 states
- Illegal in 11 states
- Varying legality in 18 states

In 2022, Pennsylvania Act 111 decriminalized the possession and distribution of drug-checking equipment, specifically naming fentanyl test strips in the legislation. The law went into effect in early 2023.



Drug Checking Services

Fentanyl and xylazine test strip distribution in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Overdose Prevention Program (POPP) is the main government-run test strip distribution program in PA. All 86 providers identified through POPP distribute fentanyl test strips, and 84 (97.7%) also provide xylazine test strips. The majority of test strip providers are government entities (47%), followed by treatment providers (21%), community-based harm reduction organizations (17%), and healthcare providers (15%) (Figure 14).

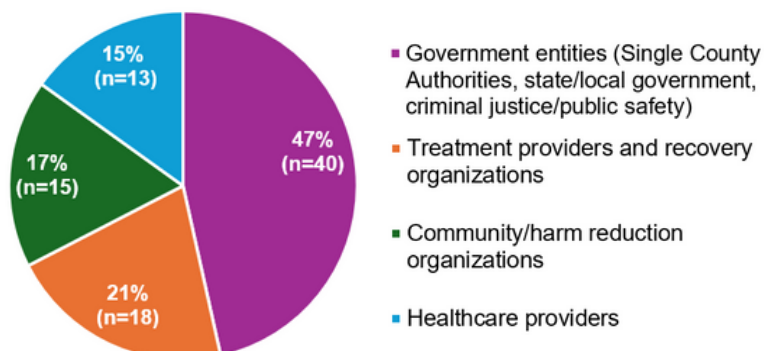


Figure 14. Types of providers of fentanyl/xylazine test strip distribution in PA

Source: Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency [18]

Drug checking by harm reduction service providers in Pennsylvania

BAG NAME	MONTH	AREA	NOTES
INI COOPER (Purple stamp)	MAR	S. SIDE	+ for FENT
MASTERMINDS	MAR	N. SIDE	TRANQ?
POWERBALL (RED STAMP)	MAR	W. END	TRANQ?
EXXON (PURPLE STAMP)	MAR	W. END	V. STRONG
UNOCO (PURPLE STAMP)	MAR	W. END	V. STRONG
GREEN DRAGON STAMP	MAR	THE HILL	+ for TRANQ
SAMA BIN LADEN (red)	MAR	MIKE'S ROY	TRANQ?
UPPER MARIO	MAR	S. SIDE	+ for TRANQ
NAZI (red stamp)	MAR	Hazelwood	+ for TRANQ
DETOX (blue stamp)	MAR	N. side/Sheridan	TRANQ?

Copyright: Prevention Point Pittsburgh

Prevention Point Pittsburgh's whiteboard tracking dangerous and adulterated drug samples, created from reports from people who use drugs.

Many harm reduction providers distribute test strips and/or communicate drug checking results to participants. The Lancaster Harm Reduction Project distributed 3,997 fentanyl and xylazine test strips to participants from mid-2022 to mid-2023. Highlands Health Clinic, based in Cambria County, distributed 750 xylazine test kits from September to December of 2023 [71]. Additionally, Prevention Point Pittsburgh maintains a whiteboard at their brick-and-mortar site displaying information about different drug bags and suspected or confirmed adulterants they contain (*pictured to the left*). They share this information through Facebook and word-of-mouth to alert people who use drugs to possible risks associated with the current local drug supply.

Drug checking & supply analysis programs in Pennsylvania

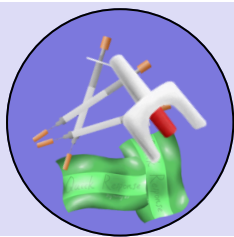


The Center for Forensic Science Research & Education

- CFSRE is a national organization partnered with labs and health departments across the country, including the Philadelphia Department of Public Health [72].
- Tests and analyzes drugs across the U.S. and directly from the streets of Philadelphia.
- Produces quarterly reports about drug purity and adulterant presence & trends.



- PA Groundhogs is a statewide drug checking and analysis initiative in Pennsylvania [73].
- Aims to improve transparency to PWUD in PA and educate physicians about drug adulteration and potency to improve the treatment of PWUD.
- Run by the Narcomedia collective in collaboration with CFSRE, the PA Harm Reduction Network, and Savage Sisters Recovery (a Philadelphia-based nonprofit).



Conclusion

This report provides an initial overview of harm reduction services in Pennsylvania, focusing on syringe services programs, overdose prevention, and drug checking. While there is considerable variability in the scope of services offered, harm reduction services—primarily overdose prevention—are available across the Commonwealth as facilitated by both local governments and community-based organizations (Figure 3). Sixteen counties (24%) exceed the statewide average rate for drug use disorder (Figure 1), yet only 9 counties (13%) offer the highest variety of harm reduction services considered in this report (Figure 3).

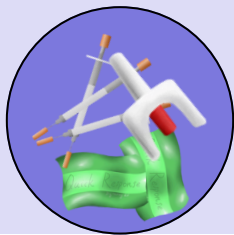
This report underscores the significant role of community-based organizations in providing harm reduction services in Pennsylvania, particularly to 'hard-to-reach' populations (p. 4-6). These organizations have evolved beyond basic services like syringe provision, and now operate as essential public health service hubs offering medical care, housing, food, public restroom access, case management, and other programs that promote the dignity and wellbeing of people who use drugs.

Syringe services programs (SSPs) are vital for public health, as recognized by their inclusion in the nine core strategies for the national opioid settlement (p. 7). Evidence suggests that SSPs help reduce the transmission of blood-borne infections such as HIV and Hepatitis C and are linked to other public health benefits (p. 7). Additionally, as of 2020, none of the PA counties with active SSPs were in the highest quantile of Hepatitis C incidence, indicating a possible inverse correlation (Figure 6). While Pennsylvania currently lacks explicit authorization for SSPs, Pennsylvania House Bill 1245 aims to legalize syringe possession and distribution statewide.

Pennsylvania's policies on overdose prevention and drug checking align more closely with public health evidence. The Commonwealth supports access to naloxone and drug testing strips statewide. Moreover, the survey conducted for this report indicates that all Single County Authorities distribute naloxone. The disproportionate number of fatal and nonfatal overdoses among the Black population indicates a need for a renewed focus on health equity in overdose prevention initiatives. While drug checking equipment has only recently been legalized in Pennsylvania, the majority of counties (59 out of 67) distribute test strips (Figure 3).

This review also uncovered data gaps that are critical for planning and implementing harm reduction services. Notably, there is a lack of periodic statewide or county-specific estimates of injection drug use, hampering the assessment of needs and coverage for syringe services programs. Furthermore, the absence of a centralized system for ongoing reporting on drug purity and adulteration across the Commonwealth poses additional challenges. Access to a reliable database tracking changing trends in drug supply is essential for adapting harm reduction services to evolving patterns of drug adulteration.

This report acknowledges several limitations. First, it does not provide the exact locations or accessibility of harm reduction programs. Second, due to insufficient data, it could not accurately estimate the current beneficiaries of harm reduction services, the populations in need, or the gap between the two. Third, while the Single County Authority survey was a significant data source for harm reduction services



Conclusion & Acknowledgements

provided by local governments, its reliance on self-reported data may introduce recall bias. Finally, this report does not comprehensively cover the contributions of activists, grassroots organizations, or other harm reduction organizations throughout the state.

In conclusion, the Commonwealth has adopted some proven harm reduction strategies, but the growing overdose crisis and evolving drug supply necessitate an expansion of all harm reduction interventions. Additional reports should focus on novel harm reduction services, such as wound care, or delivery of services via mobile clinics, vending machines, or smartphone apps. Continued monitoring of harm reduction services and resources throughout the state is essential, particularly for ensuring accessibility across counties. Ultimately, harm reduction lies at the intersection of public health, human rights, and the needs and experiences of people who use drugs. Pennsylvania should remain committed to expanding harm reduction services and resources throughout the state and prioritizing the wellbeing and dignity of all its residents.

Pennsylvania SEOW

The State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) is supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. SEOW members represent both governmental and non-governmental agencies from across Pennsylvania. The goal of the SEOW is to inform state and community decisions on programs, practices and policies regarding substance use and related behavioral health concerns.

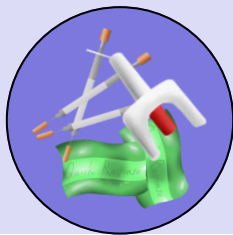
SEOW members involved in this report

Grace Kindt, Laura Suits Dolan, Jonathan Johnson, Mariko Rauch, Lauren Torso Orkis, Ralph Beishline, Rose Baker, Carrie Thomas Goetz, Tamar Wallace, Michaela Miller, Janna Ataiants, Ekaterina Fedorova, Samuel Pascal, Zachary Fوسفeld, Madeline Rockett

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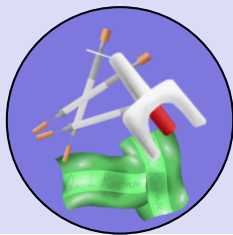
Special thanks to Carla Sofronski and Jordan Scott from the Pennsylvania Harm Reduction Network for informing the development of this report, connecting us to stakeholders, and for the advocacy, outreach, and legislative work they do for harm reduction in Pennsylvania. We would also like to thank Hilary Disch and Cari Feiler Bender from Prevention Point Philadelphia, Katie Houston from Prevention Point Pittsburgh, Melinda Zipp from the Lancaster Harm Reduction Project, and Rosalie Danchanko from Highlands Health Clinic for providing comprehensive data about their programs, images of their services, for their consistent communication, and their patience. Finally, we would like to acknowledge all harm reduction organizations and activists in Pennsylvania that provide life-saving services and increase access to resources for people who use drugs.

Cover page photo: At the opening of the Love Lot at Prevention Point Philadelphia, Kensington, Philadelphia, July 25, 2023. Photo by Janna Ataiants.



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