

# RHODE ISLAND'S HARM REDUCTION CENTER PILOT PROGRAM

## Preventing overdoses, saving lives

Harm Reduction Centers in Rhode Island are a vital part of the state's strategy to reduce overdose deaths, save lives, and connect people to essential treatment and recovery support services. These community-based resources allow people to safely consume pre-obtained controlled substances in a supportive environment without legal repercussions.

In July 2021, Governor McKee signed legislation allowing for a harm reduction center pilot program in our state. Rhode Island is among the first in the US to license and establish harm reduction centers, also called overdose prevention sites or supervised consumption sites.

Rhode Island's Harm Reduction Centers regulations ([rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/216-40-10-25](https://rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/216-40-10-25)) outline standard practices and services for harm reduction centers to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all clients and staff.

### Harm reduction means **saving lives**.

Harm reduction is a public health approach that aims to reduce problems related to substance use. This approach accepts that substance use exists in the world and focuses on minimizing harmful effects through safer drug use practices (e.g., using under supervision to prevent overdoses) and tools (e.g., using fentanyl test strips). Respect, dignity, and compassion are central to the harm reduction approach.

### In Rhode Island, we lose more than one community member **every day** to a preventable drug overdose.

Our drug overdose crisis continues to escalate and has only been worsened by COVID-19.

**2021:** Drug overdose deaths increased by 14%, with 435 Rhode Islanders lost to a preventable drug overdose. This is the highest number of lives lost ever recorded, to date.

Fentanyl continues to be involved in most fatal overdoses (77%, n=336), while cocaine-involved overdoses continue to rise (53%, n=232).

*Source: Rhode Island Office of State Medical Examiners (OSME)*

### Harm reduction is **good public health**.

While harm reduction centers are a new initiative for our state, Rhode Island has significant experience with other harm reduction strategies. For example, harm reduction street outreach services led by certified peer recovery support specialists are available across the state. Rhode Island also offers harm reduction services through the ENCORE (Education, Needle Exchange, Counseling, Outreach, and Referral) Program at AIDS Care Ocean State. For more than 30 years, this program has provided harm reduction tools and education to prevent the transmission of HIV, hepatitis C, and other blood-borne diseases.

### Harm reduction centers meet people where they are and offer a **supportive environment**.

Harm reduction centers will be designed to meet the diverse needs of Rhode Islanders who use drugs.

- Centers can be brick-and-mortar locations, mobile vans or buses, or temporary sites.
- Each Center will operate under the supervision of a medical director and a center director. On-site staff, such as certified peer recovery support specialists, case managers, nurses, or mental health counselors, will be readily available to monitor drug consumption and support clients.
- All drug consumption at the Centers will be monitored by trained staff who can respond to overdoses, if needed.

## Harm reduction centers **help people get the services they need to be healthier.**

Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a healthy life and achieve their full potential. Harm reduction centers will offer the following services to help achieve this goal:

- Addressing overdoses including naloxone administration, if needed.
- Harm reduction training and distribution of safer drug use supplies (e.g., sterile injection, snorting, and smoking supplies, and fentanyl test strips).
- Free, sterile needles and safe and secure collection of used needles.
- Linkage and referrals to recovery support programs, treatment, counseling, and wrap-around services such as housing, employment, and legal services.

## Harm reduction centers have a **positive impact on the community.**

Although harm reduction centers are still considered an innovative strategy in the US, they have been implemented in other countries since the 1980s. There is a lot of evidence that shows harm reduction centers can save lives.

- They connect people to treatment and recovery support services and bridge gaps in healthcare services for people who use drugs.
- Harm reduction centers reduce drug use in public spaces and drug paraphernalia litter (i.e., used needles and pipes) and decrease public disturbances. They do not increase crime or drug dealing in the surrounding neighborhoods.

## Harm reduction centers will be **inspected and licensed** by RIDOH.

Organizations interested in opening any harm reduction center in Rhode Island (e.g., stationary, temporary service sites, and mobile units) must submit a completed Harm Reduction Center Application to RIDOH, including:

- Application form
- Proof of municipal approval from a city/town council, or equivalent governing bodies where the center is to be located.
- Receive a site inspection by a RIDOH representative and obtain an approval of compliance. Site inspections ensure all services and practices comply with Rhode Island's regulations for *Harm Reduction Centers*: [rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/216-40-10-25](https://rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/216-40-10-25)
- Obtain an acceptable Life Safety Code/Fire Safety inspection report from the Rhode Island Office of the State Fire Marshal or a designee.

## All harm reduction centers in Rhode Island will be **rigorously evaluated.**

The harm reduction center pilot program will be evaluated to help us understand the full public health and community impact of harm reduction centers in our state. Evaluation results will be used to provide recommendations for modifications and future improvements.

## Learn more about Rhode Island's harm reduction centers and **get involved.**

- Find information on Rhode Island's Harm Reduction Center Advisory Committee: <https://bit.ly/3efkPnE>
- Connect with community advocates from the Rhode Island Harm Reduction Center Coalition: [CoalitiontoSaveLivesRI@gmail.com](mailto:CoalitiontoSaveLivesRI@gmail.com)
- Join monthly, public meetings with the Governor's Overdose Prevention and Intervention Task Force: [preventoverdoseri.org/the-task-force](https://preventoverdoseri.org/the-task-force)



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