

# NO. 1: HOW TO ADDRESS OVERDOSE RISKS AMONG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

*Culturally responsive and coordinated strategies in support of individuals experiencing homelessness with co-occurring disorders can reduce overdose risk.*

## Background

Drug overdose deaths are rising precipitously, with particularly devastating results among African Americans, Latinx people, and American Indians and Alaska Natives. One of the populations most directly affected by this crisis is people experiencing homelessness. In this context, it is time to combine our best knowledge and most effective interventions to reduce overdose deaths and address co-occurring substance use and homelessness. [Combining the best practices](#) of harm reduction, culturally responsive supportive housing, on-demand treatment, and peer-delivered recovery supports is imperative to break the cycle of addiction, mental illness, and homelessness.

## Recommendations to Coordinate Systems and Align Interventions

### State Behavioral Health Opportunities

There are many ways to use state and local policy levers to create and expand culturally responsive harm reduction, housing, treatment, and recovery support services:

- Incorporate the voices of people with lived experience (PWLE) in policy and funding decisions.
  - *Example:* Washington State Health Care Authority's [Office of Recovery Partnerships](#)
- Advance culturally responsive care within existing services.
  - *Example:* The [Community Mental Health Equity Project](#) in California
- Create funding opportunities for nontraditional partnerships.
  - *Example:* New York State's [Friends of Recovery NY](#)
- Create and enhance workforce pathways for PWLE.
  - *Example:* The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health's [Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialist Academy](#)
- Address regulatory barriers to harm reduction, supportive housing, recovery support services, and on-demand treatment.
- Cultivate cross-agency partnerships to combine funding and promote alignment of strategies.
- Develop learning communities on promising and best practices in racial equity, housing, and substance use.
- Integrate harm reduction and recovery principles across the behavioral health care continuum.
- Adopt a "medication-first" approach.
- Give providers access to a database of available resources.
- Support the development of MOUs to support coordinated services.
- Increase awareness of [Health Careers Pipeline](#) programs.
- Prioritize housing assistance in grant funding, and establish stable housing as a reporting metric for SUD grant recipients.



The NASMHPD - TTI Knowledge Bites [webinar series](#) was produced by the [National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors](#) in 2023. Each webinar is accompanied by a Knowledge Bite summarizing recommendations, community examples, and resources.

## More Examples

- **OR:** Recently passed [Measure 110](#), secured \$300 million over the biennium to fund culturally responsive SUD services, and maintains an Oversight & Accountability Council of PWLE
- **WA:** [State Opioid Treatment Network](#) integrates services into a variety of nontraditional settings, including a Syringe Service Program, a shelter, and a fire department
- **WI:** [Senate Bill 600](#) made carrying fentanyl test strips legal
- **GA:** [CARES Academy](#) supports development of a peer recovery workforce and is Medicaid billable.
- **MO:** Department of Mental Health and Opioid STR/SOR grant partners developed a [Medication First approach](#).
- **RI:** Opioid Treatment Program issues an annual state [resource guide](#) that includes SUD treatment, recovery, and housing providers.
- **PA:** [Center for Excellence](#) for Opioid Use Disorder consists of 45 centers that create community-based care management teams.
- **AZ:** [State Opioid Response](#) program identified increased access to recovery and supportive housing and increasing options for rental assistance as an objective.



## Additional Resources

- **TAC**
  - [Boosting the Power of Harm Reduction](#) Issue Brief.
  - [Heart Equity Action Lab Racial Equity and Social Justice Toolkit](#)
- **White House** [National Drug Control Strategy](#)
- **Los Angeles County** [Recent Trends in Mortality Rates and Causes of Death among People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- **SAMHSA**
  - [Boosting the Power of Harm Reduction: Strategies to Build a Coordinated and Culturally Responsive System of Care for People with Substance Use Disorders who are Experiencing Homelessness](#)
  - [Guide to Methamphetamine Use, Treatment, and Housing Considerations for People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
  - [Peer Recovery Center of Excellence](#)
  - [Whole Person Care for People Experiencing Homelessness and Opioid Use Disorder Toolkit](#)
- **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services**
  - [Overdose Prevention Strategy](#)
  - [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care](#)



For more on this topic, watch [Addressing Our Drug Overdose Deaths: Combined Strategies to Optimize Health, Wellness, and Recovery through a Culturally Responsive System of Care \(webinar\)](#).