

# HARM REDUCTION

AN APPROACH TO PREVENTING OVERDOSE  
AND INCREASING ACCESS TO SERVICES



## What is Harm Reduction?

The purpose of harm reduction is to make substance use safer, reduce harms associated with substance use, and decrease risk of overdose death. Harm reduction programming helps prevent overdose deaths by educating and empowering people who use drugs to prevent, rapidly recognize, and reverse overdoses. Individuals who engage in substance use are the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use.



## Why is it Important?

The most common substances involved in unintentional drug overdose deaths in 2022 were methamphetamine (**732 deaths**) and fentanyl (**609 deaths**). Drug overdoses are the leading cause of injury death in Oklahoma. From 2019 to 2022, the rate of unintentional drug overdose more than doubled in the state.



## It Works!

Harm reduction is a well-researched, evidence-based approach to reducing harms related to substance use, including overdose deaths, life-threatening infections related to unsterile drug injection, and chronic diseases such as HIV and hepatitis.



## It Does Not Encourage Use!

Harm reduction does not encourage substance use or force people to stop using; it is a non-judgmental approach that meets people where they are to help create opportunities to live healthier lives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OVERDOSE PREVENTION, VISIT:  
[OKLAHOMA.GOV/HEALTH/OVERDOSE](https://OKLAHOMA.GOV/HEALTH/OVERDOSE)

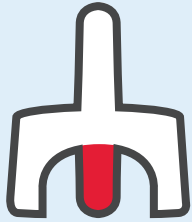


OKLAHOMA  
State Department  
of Health

## Harm Reduction Services:



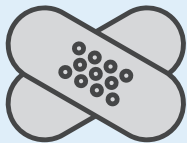
Connect individuals to overdose education, counseling, and treatment for infectious diseases and substance use disorders.



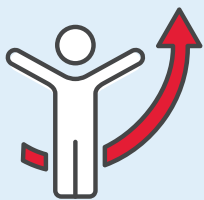
Distribute drug checking supplies (e.g., fentanyl and xylazine test strips) and opioid overdose reversal medications (e.g., naloxone) to individuals at risk of overdose or to those who are likely to respond to an overdose.



Lessen harms associated with drug use and related behaviors that increase the risk of infectious diseases, including HIV, viral hepatitis, and bacterial and fungal infections.



Reduce infectious disease transmission among people who use drugs (including those who inject drugs) by equipping them with sterile supplies, wound care, accurate information, and referrals to resources.



Promote a philosophy of hope and healing by employing people with lived experience to model what meaningful change can look like.

**Harm reduction accepts that illicit substance use is a reality, and minimizing the harmful effects is more beneficial than simply ignoring or condemning them.**

To learn more about harm reduction, how to become a registered harm reduction organization, or where harm reduction services are available, visit [oklahoma.gov/health/SHHR](http://oklahoma.gov/health/SHHR)



## Substance Use Disorder



Substance use disorder (SUD), or addiction, is a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive seeking and use, despite harmful consequences. Drugs cause physical changes in the brain that alter its structure and how it works. SUD is a complex disease, and quitting usually takes more than good intentions or a strong will. **Recovery is possible.** And like other diseases, treatment for drug use and SUD not only saves lives, but is cost effective.