

Guide to Reducing Overdoses with Non-Traditional Partners



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Contents

Overview	4
Purpose:	4
Why is community preparedness important?	4
What does community preparedness look like?	5
Non-Traditional Partners	5
Why non-traditional partners are important.....	5
Non-traditional partner success stories.....	6
Protections for non-traditional partners	6
Resources:.....	9
Outreach materials:	9
Harm and Stigma Reduction	9
Resources	9
Protections.....	9
Naloxone trainings.....	9

Overview

This guide is focused on opioid overdoses, but it is also important to note that for many people who use drugs, they are using multiple substances, also known as polysubstance use, including stimulants (i.e. methamphetamine, cocaine, ecstasy, etc.) and alcohol. Polysubstance use may be intentional or unintentional as even those who think they are taking one substance may unknowingly have a drug mixed with other adulterants.¹ While this guide contains a small amount of Michigan-specific information as it is the author's home state, please note that most of this guide can be applied to any community throughout the United States.

Per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), of the 91,799 overdose deaths in 2020, almost 75% of them involved an opioid.² Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to fifty times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. It is a major contributor to fatal and non-fatal overdoses in the United States.³ Currently, fentanyl and other synthetic opioids are causing accidental overdoses to increase, which necessitates new and evolving methods of overdose prevention.⁴

Purpose:

This guide is for Quick Response Teams (QRT), peer recovery coaches, local public health officials, Overdose Review Fatality (OFR) teams and anyone else who wants to engage community partners that are not typically included in overdose prevention. Non-traditional partners (motels, hotels, restaurants, libraries, etc.) can not only help save a life, but also be connectors, educators and advocates in addressing the opioid crisis. This guide is meant to help any community that wants to engage non-traditional partners. Though the guide specifically mentions a small amount of Michigan data, it is meant to be adjustable for others to adapt to their specific community, data and resources.

Community Preparedness

Why is community preparedness important?

Michigan has not been spared from the opioid epidemic. In 2021, 3,096 Michiganders died of an overdose.⁵ Although Michigan opioid prescribing rates are down, the state continues to see elevated use of illicit synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, which impacted 73% of overdose deaths in 2021.⁶ Also, in 2021, there were 31,017 Emergency Department (ED) non-fatal overdose visits.⁷

Many lessons have been learned over the last decade as the opioid epidemic has taken thousands of lives and one of those lessons is that no one organization or entity can mitigate this crisis. To have a greater impact on saving the lives of others, we must have a broader acceptance of those who use

¹ [Polysubstance Use Facts \(cdc.gov\)](#)

² [Understanding the Opioid Overdose Epidemic | Opioids | CDC](#)

³ [Fentanyl Facts \(cdc.gov\)](#)

⁴ [Opioid Data Analysis and Resources | Opioids | CDC](#)

⁵ [Data \(michigan.gov\)](#)

⁶ 1999-2021 Michigan Resident Death File, Division of Vital Records and Health Statistics, Michigan Department of Health, and Human Services

⁷ [Data \(michigan.gov\)](#)

drugs, an understanding of mental health issues and substance use disorder, knowledge of signs and symptoms of an overdose and access and understanding of how to respond to an overdose.

What does community preparedness look like?

Drug overdoses can happen anywhere including in public spaces such as grocery stores, parking lots, bars, gas stations, bus stations and more. The more prepared diverse community members are to respond, the more lives we can save. One valuable tool to address and reverse overdoses is the use of naloxone. Naloxone is a fast-acting drug that can reverse opioid overdose and restore normal breathing within 2-3 minutes. Administering naloxone if a drug overdose is suspected, regardless of the substance, is not harmful. **Having and utilizing naloxone at a non-traditional partner location is a low barrier to saving a life.**

Organizations that want to address overdoses with non-traditional partners will benefit from connecting with their local harm reduction organizations, health departments and/or substance use coalitions. **It is essential to leverage community partnerships in the work of overdose prevention.** There is value in forming partnerships with organizations in your community that can provide naloxone training, free naloxone, and other important harm-reduction initiatives to non-traditional partners.

In most states, including Michigan, there is a standing order for naloxone which allows anyone to obtain, carry, and use it on someone overdosing. **Additionally, the Food and Drug Administration approved Naloxone nasal spray for over-the-counter (OTC), nonprescription use on March 29th, 2023.**⁸

Providing training and naloxone to those working in grocery stores, gas and bus stations, bars, restaurants and other establishments could save the life of someone experiencing an overdose. This guide will provide information on how to engage non-traditional partners in the fight against opioid overdose deaths.

Non-Traditional Partners

Why non-traditional partners are important.

The opioid epidemic is continuously evolving. **While evidence-based, traditional methods to prevent overdoses should still be utilized, the ever-changing landscape of opioids requires innovation to continue making progress and saving lives.** Engaging non-traditional partners in overdose prevention is one example of innovation. **Non-traditional partners consist of any organizations, businesses or non-profits that wouldn't normally have experience with overdose prevention like houses of worship, music venues, laundromats, etc.** While overdose prevention is a part of organizations working in public health, harm reduction, and emergency first responders, it has often been invisible to those in other sectors. Within overdose fatality reviews (OFRs) and quick response teams (QRTs), a gap is being identified in many communities with non-traditional partners. Overdoses happen not just at home, but in many public spaces. **Creating allies in non-traditional community spaces responding to overdose prevention can save lives.**

⁸ [FDA Approves First Over-the-Counter Naloxone Nasal Spray | FDA](#)

Examples of Non-Traditional Partners		
Convenience Stores/Gas Stations	Hotels/Motels	Libraries
Buses (bus drivers) and Bus Stations	Fast Food Restaurants	Bars
Concert Venues/Music Festivals	Grocery Stores	Environmental Health (sanitarians)
Laundromats	Chamber of Commerce	Houses of Worship
Schools	State Tourism Boards	Hotel and Lodging Associations
Unions	Ubers/Lyfts/Taxis	Restaurant and Hospitality Associations
Cinemas/Theatres	Home Service Companies (plumbers, electricians, heating and cooling, etc.)	Tattoo Parlors

Non- traditional Partner Success Stories

The following are examples of organizations that have incorporated naloxone kits into their policies.

- Nashville bars and restaurants given Narcan safety kits to help fight opioid epidemic | WZTV (fox17.com)
- OHLA | Safety & Training (ohiolodging.com)
- Stocking Narcan in Hospitality Industry | HUB International
- Narcan kits will soon be available in green hotels (news5cleveland.com)

Protections for Non-Traditional Partners

During a drug overdose, a quick response can save a life. However, people illegally using drugs sometimes fail to seek medical attention during an overdose for fear of alerting the police to their illegal drug use. To prioritize saving lives, Michigan passed a Good Samaritan law in 2016. [Michigan’s Good Samaritan law](#) prevents drug possession charges against those who seek medical assistance for an overdose in certain circumstances. This law makes saving lives the priority during a drug overdose, not criminal prosecutions of illegal drug users.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

While engaging non-traditional partners is a worthwhile and innovative option to reduce overdoses, there may be barriers along the way. The following non-exhaustive table identifies potential solutions or talking points to barriers that may come up when engaging with non-traditional partners.

Potential Barriers	Possible Solutions			
<p>Denial of substance use near their business</p>	<p>Invite them to attend a coalition or OFR meeting. This can help illustrate the community’s need for overdose prevention and can increase buy-in.</p>	<p>Educate about the opioid epidemic, harm reduction, and overdose prevention.</p>	<p>1 in 7 Americans reports experiencing a substance use disorder. There is not one single driving factor that leads to addiction. Some people may use drugs to help cope with stress, trauma or to help with mental health issues. (Stigma Reduction (cdc.gov))</p>	<p>In agreeing to train employees on overdose prevention and carrying naloxone in their place of business, companies demonstrate their belief in first aid for all and that they are committed to keeping their customers safe.</p>
<p>Corporate policies</p>	<p>Leverage partnerships with larger organizations when able. For example, work with local trade organizations, unions, Chambers of Commerce to garner buy-in to create policy change at the corporate level. Often, more impact can be made with individual organizations if you have the support of the governing body.</p>	<p>Partner with the local public health department to add naloxone possession to checklists for sanitarians, health inspectors, etc. These health department employees can offer naloxone during lodging or restaurant inspections.</p>	<p>Explain that storing and using naloxone can prevent fatal overdoses and reduce negative attention if overdoses occur.</p>	<p>Work with State/City Tourism Boards/Coalitions to approach them as they often hold more sway over individual organizations.</p>

Stigma	AEDs are an important lifesaving tool in first aid and they are commonplace in many businesses. Naloxone can and should be viewed in the same way. No one can predict where or when an overdose or heart attack may occur, and the use of AEDs and Naloxone can mitigate harm.	Educate about the opioid epidemic, harm reduction, and overdose prevention.	Stigma is still a significant issue for those with substance use disorder. It is important to gently educate that substance use disorder is a chronic brain disease and not a choice or moral failing. (Drug Misuse and Addiction National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) (nih.gov))	
Lack of time/ resources/ buy in	Please see examples of successful non-traditional partnerships above this table.	Invite them to the table even if it is just to attend a coalition or OFR meeting. This helps illustrate the need in the community for overdose prevention and can increase buy in. It can also help to humanize the issue of overdoses in public places.	Build goodwill by helping with something else when possible. For example, offering training on emerging drug trends for a health department.	Explain that storing and using naloxone can prevent fatal overdose and reduce negative attention if overdoses occur.
Liability concerns	If worried about liability, please seek legal counsel. Additionally, links to the Naloxone and Good Samaritan laws are provided under the Protections section above.			

Resources:

Outreach materials:

- [Email template](#)
- [Script](#)

Harm and Stigma Reduction

Harm and stigma reduction are essential components to reducing overdoses and they range from the language you use to accessing needed resources at local organizations. There are many harm reduction organizations and resources throughout the state, and a few are listed below. While many links are provided, please consider other local resources as well.

Resources

- [Map of Michigan SSPs](#)
- [Map of Michigan Narcan Vending Machines](#)
- [Social Vulnerability Index](#)
- [OpiRescue](#)

Protections

- [Michigan's Good Samaritan Law](#)
- [FDA Approves First Over-the-Counter Naloxone Nasal Spray | FDA](#)

Naloxone trainings

- Online trainings:
 - [Opioid Education | American Heart Association CPR & First Aid](#)
 - [Naloxone Rescue Training for the community on Vimeo](#)
 - [Naloxone Quick Start Guide](#)
- Other training options and naloxone sources:
 - Local Syringe Service Programs
 - Local Health Departments
 - Local Recovery Centers