



## Importance of Overdose Prevention in Jails

Fatal overdoses in the immediate period following release from incarceration are all too common. A study in Washington State found that people recently released from prison were 129 times more likely to die from a drug overdose compared with the general population.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, another study in North Carolina showed that formerly incarcerated people were 40 times more likely to die from an opioid-related overdose within the first two weeks of release compared to others in the state.<sup>2</sup> In Minnesota between 2010 and 2019, drug overdose deaths were responsible for one in every three deaths occurring in individuals within one year of release from the Department of Corrections, with 20% of those deaths occurring in just the first two weeks of release.<sup>3</sup> These overdose deaths are preventable. Interventions such as (1) providing substance use disorder treatment to people in carceral settings, (2) distributing naloxone, and (3) linking people to care/treatment when they leave jail are evidenced-based ways that jails can help prevent overdose deaths in their communities. Below are resources to help jails implement these strategies.

## Resources for Implementing Evidence-Based Overdose Prevention Strategies in Criminal Justice Settings

The [Overdose Response Strategy](#) (ORS) has compiled resources to provide guidance on implementing evidence-based overdose prevention strategies to address the overdose crisis among justice-involved individuals. These evidence-based prevention strategies are supported by the [National Commissions on Correctional Health Care](#), [Law Enforcement Action Partnership](#), [American Correctional Association](#), and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

## Substance Use Disorder Treatment

The following resources provide information on screening for substance use disorder (SUD) and providing medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). MOUD refers to the use of three Food and Drug Administration-approved medications (i.e., methadone, naltrexone, and buprenorphine) for treating opioid use disorder (OUD). Providing MOUD in jails is highly effective. Research shows it reduced the risk of death following incarceration by 75% and reduces the risk of death from overdose by 85% in the first month following release. Further, treatment with methadone or buprenorphine is shown to lower rates of re-arrest and reincarceration.<sup>4</sup>

- [Screening and Assessment Tools Chart](#) (National Institute on Drug Abuse)  
Provides a comprehensive guide on evidence-based screening and assessment tools
- [Overdose Prevention in Jails](#) (Overdose Response Strategy)  
Examines evidence-based prevention services in jails to address the overdose crisis and share perspectives of those implementing these services in a correctional setting
- [Meeting the Needs of Individuals with Substance Use Disorders: Strategies for Jails](#) (National Association of Counties) Provides strategies on screening for SUDs, training jail staff, creating an environment that facilitates rehabilitation, and effectively connecting individuals to treatment upon release
- [Jail-Based Medication-Assisted Treatment: Promising Practices, Guidelines, and Resources for the Field](#) (National Sheriffs Association and National Commission on Correctional Health Care)  
Shares lessons learned from innovative uses of MOUD, describes program components, and discusses the best program implementation practices

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- [Use of Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder in Criminal Justice Settings](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) Provides an overview of how MOUD is used to treat substance use disorders, sustain recovery, and prevent overdose
- [Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder in Jails and Prisons: A Planning & Implementation Toolkit](#) (National Council for Mental Wellbeing) Provides correctional administrators and health care providers with information on implementing MOUD programs within jails and prisons
- [Jails and Methadone Provision](#) (Bureau of Justice Assistance) Provides an overview of methadone provision in jails and narcotic treatment program licensing

## Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution

The following resources provide information on overdose education and naloxone distribution (OEND) programs to reduce opioid-involved overdose and deaths among justice-involved individuals. OEND engages individuals who are likely to witness an overdose-- including incarcerated individuals, their peers, and their family members-- and trains them to respond more effectively.

- [A Primer for Implementation of Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution in Jails and Prisons](#) (RTI International) Includes strategies for developing, coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating OEND programs and shares lessons learned from implementing OEND programs by county stakeholders
- [Guide to Developing and Managing Overdose Prevention and Take-Home Naloxone Projects](#) (National Harm Reduction Coalition) Outlines the process of developing and managing an OEND program
- [Jail-based Overdose Prevention Education and Naloxone Distribution](#) (North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition) Provides guidelines for establishing a jail-based overdose prevention program and educational information to train participants on harm reduction and overdose prevention strategies
- [Minnesota Department of Health Naloxone Portal](#) Provides instructions for how jails can order naloxone at no cost from the state

## Re-entry and Linkage to Care

The following resources highlight strategies for assisting justice-involved individuals in returning to their communities upon release from jail or prison and connect with treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services.

- [Release Planning for Successful Reentry: A Guide for Corrections, Service Providers, and Community Groups](#) (Urban Institute Justice Policy Center) Assists correctional partners in developing and improving release planning procedures
- [Creating Reach Beyond the Jail Walls: An Implementation Guide for Harm Reduction Re-Entry Wrap Around Services Programs](#) (Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services) Guides community-based harm reduction organizations in how to collaborate with local correctional facilities to provide re-entry services for people who use drugs
- [Meeting the Needs of Individuals with Substance Use Disorders: Strategies for Reentry from Jail](#) (National Association of Counties) Discusses strategies that counties can implement to connect people with SUDs to community-based treatment and services

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## Medicaid Reentry Section 1115 Demonstration Opportunity

In April 2023, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced a new opportunity for states to help increase care for individuals who are incarcerated in the period immediately prior to their release to help them succeed during reentry. The Medicaid Reentry Section 1115 Demonstration Opportunity allows state Medicaid programs to cover services that address health concerns, including substance use disorder and other chronic health conditions. The goal of the demonstration is to help Medicaid enrollees to establish connections to community providers to ensure their health needs are met during the reentry process. Under this demonstration, states would be able to cover a package of pre-release services for up to 90 days prior to an individual's expected release date. Medicaid does not otherwise cover these services because of a statutory exclusion that does not allow Medicaid payment for most services provided to people in a state or county carceral facility. The State of Minnesota has not yet applied for this demonstration opportunity. For more information on the demonstration opportunity, please visit the [HHS website](#).

## Relevant Research on Overdose Prevention

Strategy	Outcome of interest	Description
<b>Substance Use Disorder Treatment</b>	Overdose	Receiving MOUD while incarcerated reduces the risk of non-fatal overdose when individuals continue treatment post-release. <sup>5,6</sup>
	Mortality	Receiving MOUD while incarcerated reduces the risk of death in the first four weeks post-release. <sup>7</sup>
	Engagement in community treatment	Receiving MOUD while incarcerated is associated with greater engagement in community treatment post-release. <sup>8-10</sup>
	Recidivism	Receiving MOUD while incarcerated reduces the risk of recidivism. <sup>9,11</sup>
<b>Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution</b>	Overdose and naloxone experience	Implementing OEND in jails is feasible and can effectively engage individual at high-risk for overdose. Among incarcerated individuals that received naloxone, 32% reported reversing an overdose and 44% received refills from community-based programs after reentry. <sup>12</sup>
<b>Re-entry and Linkage to Care</b>	Opioid relapse	Linking justice-involved men to extended-release naltrexone is associated with lower the rates of relapse after release from jail. <sup>13</sup>
	Substance use, treatment motivations, and self-efficacy	Engaging in community-based peer support services reduces substance use and increases self-efficacy and treatment among previously incarcerated individuals with SUD. <sup>14</sup>

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## Need Additional Assistance?

For further guidance and support on overdose prevention in criminal justice settings or other relevant topics, contact the [ORS team](#) in your state or territory.

## References

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3. Minnesota Management and Budget. (2021). Treating Opioid Use Disorder for Criminal Justice Involved Individuals. [Medication for Opioid Use Disorder for Individuals in the Criminal Justice System \(mn.gov\)](#)
4. Evidence Based Strategies for Abatement of Harms from the Opioid Epidemic. [TheOpioidEbatement-v3.pdf \(lac.org\)](#)
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13. Lee, JD, McDonald R, Grossman E, McNeely J, Laska E, Rotrosen J, and Gourevitch MN. Opioid treatment at release from jail using extended-release naltrexone: a pilot proof-of-concept randomized effectiveness trial. *Addiction*. 2015; 110:1008– 1014.
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