

January 23rd 2024

Dear Members of the Vermont Legislature,

As a nurse practitioner and community member in Burlington, I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for H.72 and OPCs in Vermont.

Over the past twelve years, I have cared for countless patients with active substance use and patients in recovery. Many of these individuals are navigating complex and challenging life circumstances, often in the process of healing from past or ongoing trauma. I often hear from patients about the poor treatment they have experienced within the healthcare system—judgment, stigma, and a lack of compassion, all of which make recovery even more difficult. OPCs are an essential hub for accessing nonjudgmental, supportive care that reduces harm and saves lives.

There is a vast body of research over the past 20 years supporting the life-saving role of OPCs, which are already utilized in countries outside the US. Data shows that OPCs reduce public drug use, increase access to substance use treatment, and drastically reduce overdoses *without* increasing crime. With drug use and overdose skyrocketing in Vermont, we have no time to waste in implementing these essential resources.

“Meeting people where they are” is one of the guiding principles of nursing practice. OPCs and harm reduction measures allow us to do just that, providing needed resources and support directly to folks using drugs. We know that simply arresting and incarcerating community members is an ineffective and harmful strategy—it will not move us any closer to co-creating a safe state for all Vermonters. It is clear that OPCs are the most evidence-based and effective path forward—I urge you to vote in support of H.72.

In solidarity and respect,  
Gena Zollman, FNP, APRN  
Doctorate in Nursing Practice