

January 6, 2024



800-649-2437 | vtcares.org

Dear Members of the VT Legislature,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for H.72, a crucial policy initiative that addresses the overdose crisis by removing legal barriers to establishing overdose prevention sites.

As a harm reductionist with lived and living experience of drug use, I proudly lead Vermont CARES, the state's oldest HIV AIDS Service Organization, and the widest-reaching Syringe Service Program. I urge you to vote in favor of Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs). Extensive research from over 100 sites in 11 countries, including recent studies in NYC, supports the efficacy of OPCs.

Rather than delving into statistics, I am sharing why I advocate for these centers. It is about envisioning communities that value every life, regardless of circumstances. Our society includes diverse individuals grappling with drug use, trauma, poverty, and mental health issues, often compounded by being unhoused. Supporting OPCs is a commitment to providing safer conditions, health services, warmth, compassion, and understanding to those on the margins.

Providing a safe, supervised space where sterile supplies are available and easy to dispose of after use also addresses some of the concerns about public drug use and litter on the streets and in the parks. We need to bring our people in off the streets and give them a safe place to go and be cared for.

It is no secret that the journey to acceptance and understanding can be a long one. Reflect on the time it took for our communities to embrace Syringe Service Programs. Today, we recognize the value they bring, and many wish to have them in their towns. Similarly, the Overdose Prevention Center is a vital step forward—an extension of our commitment to supporting people who use drugs from a true harm reduction model.

These centers prevent fatal overdoses and serve as a bridge to essential services, including substance use treatment. Accessibility is key, and embedding these services within the center ensures a seamless transition to the help individuals need.

At the core of this initiative is a belief in the worth of every individual. By bringing OPCs to our state, we stand against stigma, shame, and judgment, prioritizing the health and well-being of our neighbors in need.

In conclusion, OPCs are not merely places to consume drugs safely; they are beacons of hope that can save lives. By supporting these centers, we take a united stand against fatal overdoses and the isolation that often leads to them. Let us affirm that everyone deserves a chance to live, and through OPCs, we extend that chance to those who need it most. I firmly believe that this action can make a profound difference and save lives within our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Theresa Vezina".

Theresa Vezina
Executive Director, Vermont CARES

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