

Overdose Prevention Center Letter of Support

Overdose prevention centers are a novel way to decrease many of the issues that come with drug use and substance use disorder. By creating a centralized place where people can safely consume drugs, under the watchful eye of professionals trained to deal with any situation that may occur, where services such as housing, employment, legal and healthcare support can be readily available, we can minimize many of the issues that arise with drug use, such as emergency room visits, homelessness, mental health issues and police intervention. Keeping overdoses to a minimum and keeping each other as healthy and as safe as possible has long been a task taken on by fellow drug users and grassroots groups in the community. It is time to move this responsibility into the realm of public health.

For fifteen years, i have been a drug user, in and out of recovery through many different types of programs and facilities. During my time as a active user, and now my time as the harm reduction coordinator at the Aids Project of Southern Vermont, i have watched the drug market landscape shift drastically. The market has shifted from primarily heroin, to heroin cut with fentanyl, to also exclusively fentanyl. During this market shift, overdoses rose massively, to the point that now more Americans have died from from an overdose in the last twenty years than have ever died from HIV in the United states. Nearly have of all Americans know somebody who has died from an overdose. When the supply was primarily heroin, overdose was always in the back of our minds when we used, but it wasn't something we feared or expected. Now, every user knows that each time they use that chance of overdose is staggeringly real. It is in the forefront of ever users mind, and the minds of their friends, family and loved ones.

This is no longer a issue that we can ignore socially or culturally, and is has grown to a size where individual organizations and communities can no longer bear the brunt of the issue. With the opening of OPCs we can couple all of the resources and services that will help people move forward and be better members of our communities, rather than solely keeping people alive. Even in terms of just preventing overdoses, OPC's are more effective at preventing overdose and treating the ones that do occur, before they can develop into a serious and damaging situation. The successes that other programs, both in the united states and abroad, show that community engagement and stabilization are the primary driving factors in helping people reach a sustainable and healthy life. I always say, "You can't get clean if you're dead". By stripping down as many of the barriers to treatment, resources and healthcare that we can, we not only help people become better citizens and loved ones, but we save our communities money by reducing constant emergency room visits, police involvement and crime.

Over all, whether from a public health point of view, a moralistic view, or an economic view, it makes more sense to treat the issues that lead to the disease than the symptoms of it. If you only treat the nausea and fatigue from an illness it will continue to develop and worsen, whereas if you treat the illness itself the nausea and fatigue will be reduced or disappear by proxy. Data from both programs in the United states, canada, and all over the world have shown

that coupling the necessary resources people need to get to the core of their trauma is an effective way to reduce the by products of chaotic drug use, which in turn saves money due to a reduction in use of public health services, crime and police engagement. The sooner we stop looking at drug use and mental health issues in a moralistic light the sooner we can engage data drive models to help our communities. You don't have to necessarily agree with the moral foundation of something for it to be a functional solution to your problem.

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