

Overdose Prevention Center Implementation Update

Saving lives, connecting people to care, improving community health and safety

VCJR *Vermonters for
Criminal Justice Reform*



Who Are We

Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform VCJR operates a walk-in re-entry and recovery center for justice-involved people with substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders.

VCJR will soon operate an Overdose Prevention Center in Burlington, Vermont.



Services We Currently Offer

- Walk-in access to case management
- Treatment options counseling, referral and linkages to care
- Transportation to inpatient treatment, medical appointments, etc.
- Housing navigation and retention support
- Crisis support and referral
- Systems navigation support and advocacy
- **Low barrier medical clinic in partnership with Johnson Health Center**
 - Walk-in medical care combined with medical case management
 - Wound and infection care
 - On demand MOUD access (including long-acting injectable forms)
 - Transportation, accompaniment and advocacy at the emergency room and during hospital stays
 - STI screening & treatment/ HIV and Hepatitis C testing & treatment
 - On site lab testing, pharmacy and insurance support



Who We Engage With

- Over **400 high-risk** people with substance use disorder on site at our re-entry and recovery center
- **82%** report a history of overdose
- 82% tested positive for both stimulants & opioids at intake
- **90%** were not accessing services at an existing recovery center
- **82%** reported current injection drug use at intake
- 49% of participants are recently released from incarceration
- Over 90% reported being unhoused or temporarily or unstably housed (e.g., short periods of couch surfing, emergency hotels, staying in places not meant for habitation)



How Did We Get Here?

June 2024



Vermont passes H.72 (Act 178), which includes the development of an overdose prevention center (OPC) in Burlington.

Feb 2025



Burlington posts requests for Letters of Intent as a pre-application for interested OPC providers.

Dec 2025



City Council unanimously approved a binding grant agreement authorizing the City to fund and oversee VCJR to operate an OPC.

Phase 1 Implementation

Community Engagement

- Participated in presentations and listening sessions with the City at **NPA Ward meetings**
- Collaborated with the City to plan and facilitate a very successful **educational OPC webinar**
- Explored potential OPC partnerships with key service providers
 - Collaborated with Johnson Health Center, Howard Center, **University of Vermont Medical Center providers**, Pathways and Vermont Cares to explore potential service collaborations
- Developed a community engagement plan and stakeholder outreach list
- Engaged with many advocates, community members, and stakeholders to share updates, gather feedback, address concerns, and provide education while correcting misinformation
- **Surveyed people who use drugs** to better understand needs, concerns, use patterns and estimate OPC utilization

Policies and Procedures

- Began drafting OPC job descriptions
- Completed initial drafts of key policies and procedures; next step is to incorporate feedback and work with Administrative Body for revisions and finalizations

Site Acquisition:

- Collaborated closely with the City of Burlington to explore siting options and considerations
- Collaborated closely with PIRE and the City to help execute the service assessment which will help inform siting

Other

- Hired an OPC Director
- Hired two subcontractors to support implementation and community engagement
- Provided supervision, technical support, and guidance to contractors to define key work areas, monitor progress, and ensure grant compliance
- Conducted research and program reviews related to OPC and associated implementation areas
- Consulted with stakeholders on database needs, including technical assistance coordination and vendor quotes
- Ensured ongoing alignment with OPC guidelines to maintain compliance throughout planning activities

Technical Assistance from Project Weber/RENEW

- Site acquisition strategies for a fixed location
- Database needs, selection, and procurement
- Budget development and financial planning
- Staff training planning
- Core service delivery models
- Community engagement and education strategies

Service Assessment (PIRE)

- Conducted in accordance with the Vermont Overdose Prevention Center Operating Guidelines (Appendix A).
- It engaged people with lived experience in Burlington, VT, along with community members and partners, to inform OPC structure, operations, and policies
 - VCJR recruited PWLE, organized and hosted PIRE and PWLE for surveying
- Data collection components were included to deepen understanding of the population served, capture community perspectives, and support effective implementation and City oversight.



Project Weber Renew is an OPC that opened in January 2025. Since opening, they have supported over 700 individuals across more than 7,900 visits, intervened in 173 life-threatening overdose events, and directly prevented at least 91 fatal overdoses.

Service Assessment Info & Results

People with Living Experience (PWLE)

People with Living Experience (PWLE) Survey

Between October 2025 and March 2026, a Services Assessment Report was conducted to inform the planning, design, and implementation of an OPC. Its primary purpose was to center the perspectives of PWLE who use drugs.

49 PWLE were surveyed.

History and Risk of Overdose

- Approximately half (47%) had experienced an overdose in the past year
- Of those who experienced an overdose in the past year, approximately one quarter of them were alone during their most recent overdose
- 43% reported using alone most or all of the time
- 14% of respondents experienced five or more overdoses in the past year



Substance Use (methods of drug consumption in the past 30 days)

- 96% Smoked or inhaled
- 53% Injected (Of those who injected drugs, 30% either always or sometimes needed help injecting or to have someone inject for them)
- 12% either ingested or snorted.
- Note: Many people use more than one method (sometimes smoke and sometimes inject)

Housing Status

- 80% reported being unhoused indicating they were unsheltered or living in an outdoor public space within the past three months.
- 16% reported living in an apartment or house that they rented or owned in the past three months.

Health Conditions

- All but two respondents reported having at least one chronic health condition, such as chronic circulation problems, wounds or scarring from an injury, abscesses, diabetes, Hepatitis C, or other conditions affecting the heart, liver or lungs.

Who will be Using the OPC & Why?

People with Living Experience (PWLE)

Of the 49 PWLE surveyed, 92% responded that they would consider using the OPC once it opens and 73% would use it all or most of the time.

PWLE shared the following reasons they would utilize an OPC

- **98% Access to compassionate overdose response**
- 98% Access to overdose prevention supplies & education
- **98% Access to health professionals** (e.g., basic medical care, wound care)
- 96% Able to use indoors rather than in public
- 96% Access to sterile injection and/or smoking equipment
- **93% Access to referrals for treatment or social services**
- 93% Safety from being seen and/or arrested by police while at the OPC

Note: Participants could select more than one option



Reasons PWLE would use an OPC continued....

- 93% Want any overdose to be reversed/avoid fatal overdose
- 91% On-site drug checking
- 91% Safety from crime or violence
- 80% Don't want to use alone
- 20% wrote in additional services they would like access to.

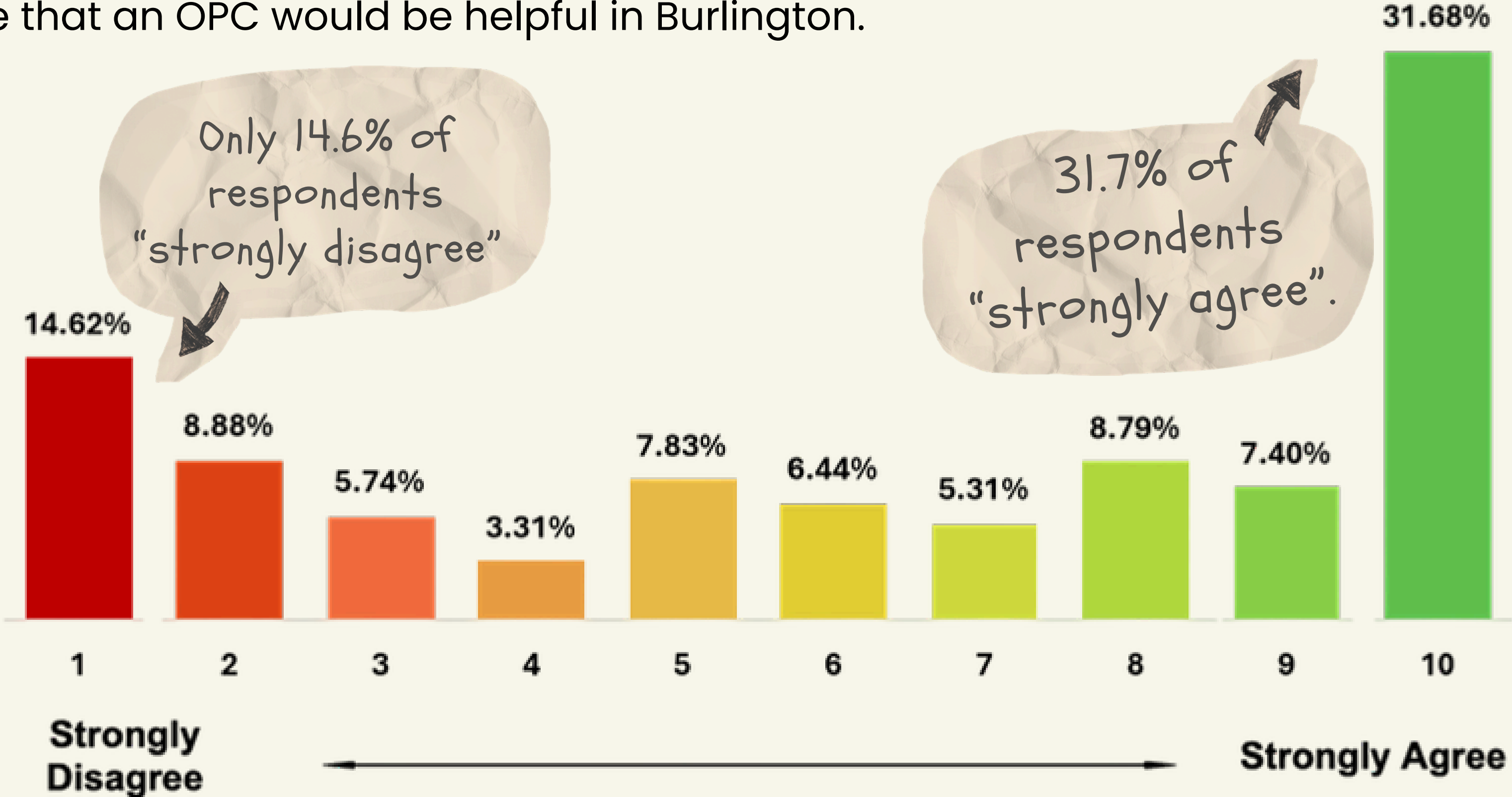
This means that participants wrote in additional services that they think would be helpful. This does not mean they would not utilize other services

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Will an OPC be Helpful to Our Community?

Community survey respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that an OPC would be helpful in Burlington.



Our Goal

Our goal is to **save lives** by intervening on overdoses in the moment they happen and by connecting people to wrap around care that significantly reduces health and safety risks. We recognize that substance use disorder is a chronic, relapsing condition that often includes periods of active use, return to use, and periods of non-use, and we aim to support people at every stage. The OPC will create opportunities for people to access treatment and recovery services when intervention is most effective; in the moment people ask for it.