
**Report to
The Vermont Legislature**

**Overdose Prevention Centers Evaluation Report
2025 Report to the Legislature**

In Accordance with Act 178 (H.72) of 2024: An act relating to a harm-reduction criminal justice response to drug use.

Submitted to: Vermont General Assembly

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Overdose Prevention Centers Evaluation Report 2025 Report to the Legislature January 15, 2025

Introduction

The purpose of this legislative report is to satisfy requirements in [Act 178](#) of 2024 including Sec. 3 (b) The Department of Health shall collaborate with the researcher or independent consulting entity to provide the General Assembly with interim annual reports on or before January 15 of each year with a final report containing the results of the study and any recommendations on or before January 15, 2029.

Pursuant to the Act, the Vermont Department of Health (hereafter “the Department”) contracted with Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) to study the impact of the overdose prevention center (OPC) pilot program authorized in Sec. 2 of the Act. This report presents baseline data aligned with the goals stated in the Act because the pilot OPC has not yet been established. Additionally, 2023 was chosen as the baseline year for these data as complete data for 2024 is not yet available.

This report focuses on the following:

1. the state of the overdose crisis and deaths in 2023 across the State of Vermont, in Chittenden County, and in Burlington;
2. the crime rates in 2023 in Burlington;
3. the rates of syringe litter in 2023 in Burlington;
4. the number of emergency medical services response calls in 2023 related to overdoses across Vermont and in Burlington;
5. the rate of syringe services program participant uptake of treatment and recovery services in 2023; and
6. the rates of opioid related medical needs across Vermont in 2023 focusing on endocarditis and strep A.

The data on which the measures reported below are based are collected from a variety of data systems as noted in each section.

Summary of PIRE contract activities

The contract between the Department and PIRE was executed in September 2024. One goal of the contract was to support a potential Vermont partnership with the Study Assessing the Effectiveness of Overdose Prevention Centers through Evaluation Research (SAFER), which is a collaboration between Brown University School of Public Health and New York University Grossman School of Medicine. Funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), SAFER aims to evaluate the effectiveness of OPCs in New York City and Rhode Island. This work would inform the Vermont OPC pilot program’s impact measures in future legislative

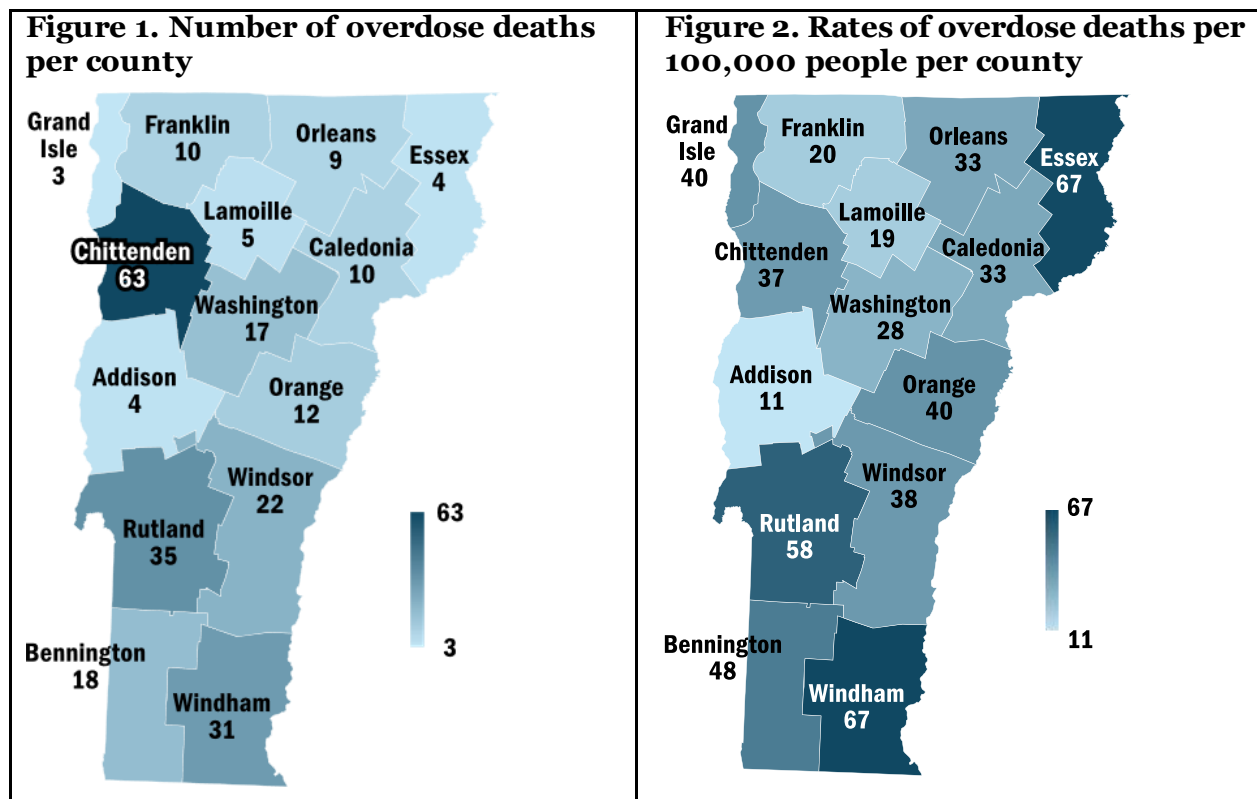
reports. PIRE assisted SAFER in applying for additional NIDA funding in October 2024 to study the neighborhood effects of the Vermont OPC pilot program.

In addition, PIRE collaborated with the Department to develop this interim report.

State of the overdose crisis and deaths across Vermont, Chittenden County and the City of Burlington¹

In 2023, there were 243 overdose deaths in Vermont. At 63 deaths, Chittenden County had the largest number of deaths in the state followed by Rutland and Windham with 35 and 31 deaths, respectively (Figure 1).

Although Chittenden had the highest number of overdose deaths, rates per 100,000 people were higher in Windham, Rutland, and Bennington Counties followed by Orange, Windsor, and Chittenden (Figure 2). Due to their smaller population sizes relative to other counties, caution is advised in interpreting the high overdose death rates in Essex and Grand Isle.



Acute mixed drug intoxication was the main contributor to overdose deaths with fentanyl, a synthetic drug, most frequently listed as the main drug. Other frequently listed drugs included cocaine and xylazine.

In 2023, overdose deaths occurred in multiple towns within Chittenden County (See Figure 3), but the more than half (35) occurred in Burlington, with the greatest concentration of deaths occurring in the downtown area (see Figure 4). Downtown Burlington is the most likely location

¹ Data source: Vermont Vital Statistics System

for the pilot OPC and in future reports the Department will be able to focus more specifically on the impacts within this immediate neighborhood as well as on surrounding communities.

Figure 3. Overdose deaths in Chittenden County

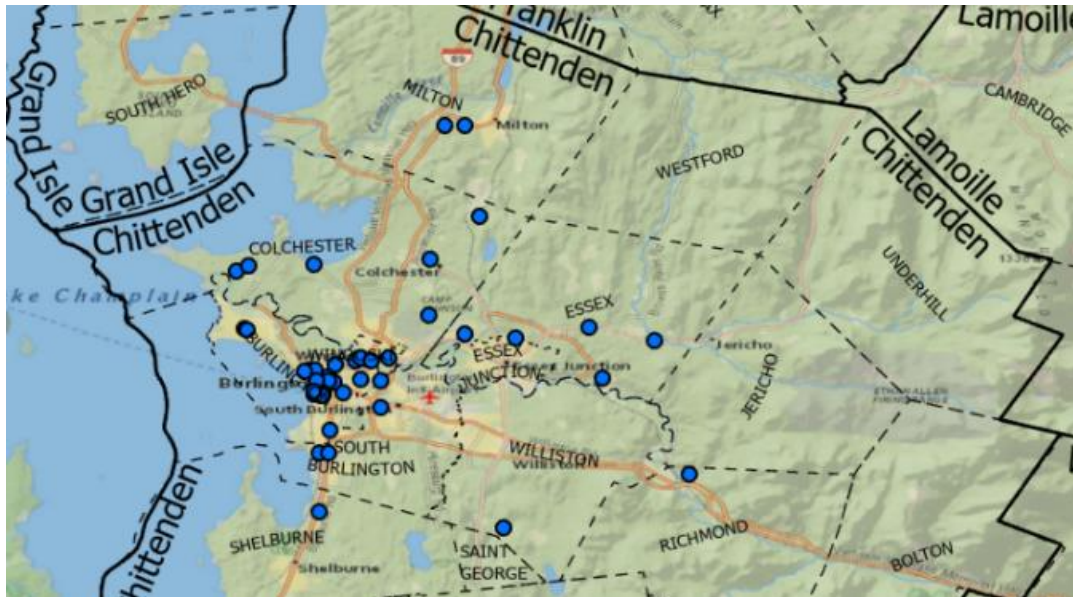
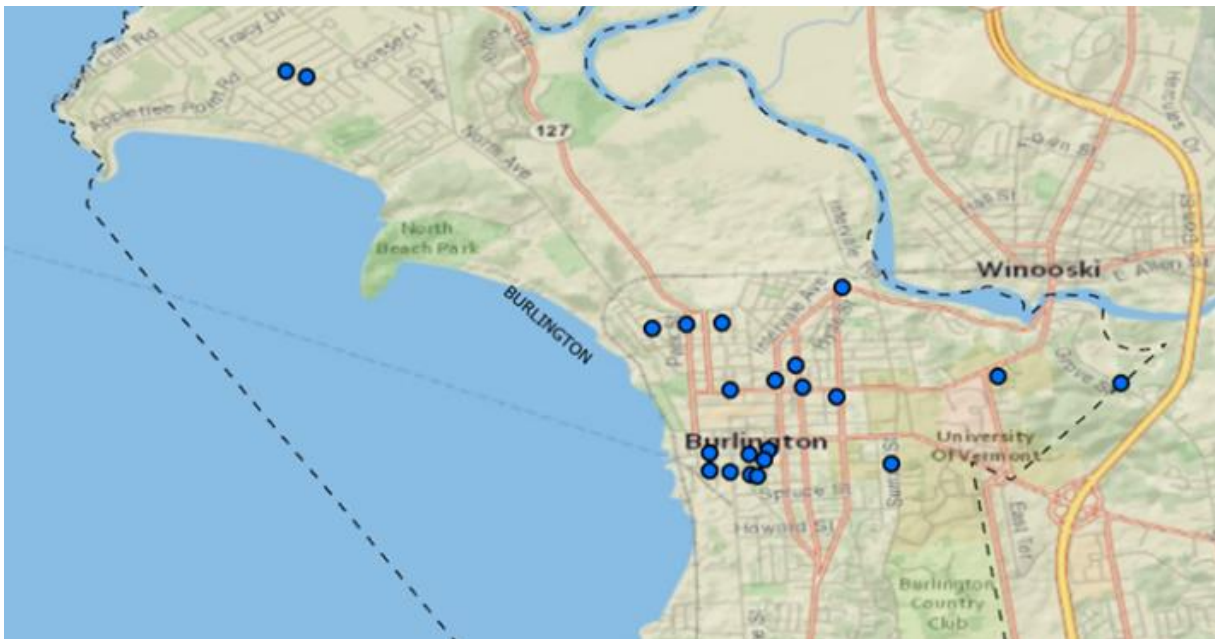


Figure 4. Overdose deaths in Burlington

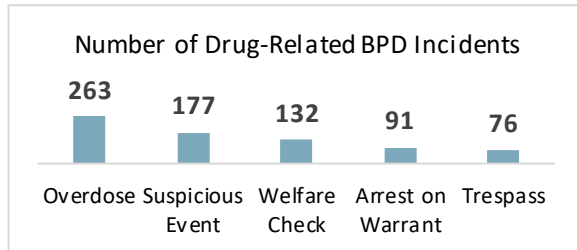


Note: There are 10 overdose deaths not included in the Chittenden County and Burlington maps due to missing information on specific location of death. The location of death for all 10 was listed as the hospital and it is unclear whether death occurred elsewhere.

Crime Rates in the City of Burlington in 2023

The Burlington Police Department (BPD) responded to 1,718 drug-related incidents in 2023. An "incident" is a measure of police activity. For example, a 911 call for a domestic disturbance, a traffic stop, an officer logging a foot patrol, or multiple calls reporting the same suspected gun shot. Most incidents are not crimes and do not result in arrest.

Figure 5. Bar graph of most frequent incidents²

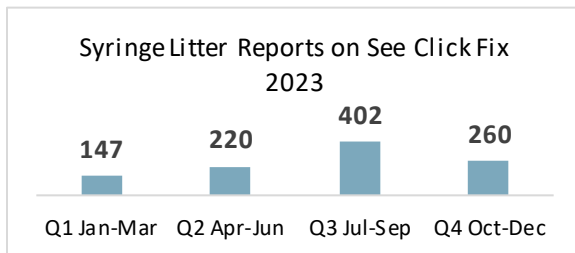


The most frequent drug-related incidents were overdoses, suspicious events, welfare checks, court-ordered arrests, and trespass. At 40, motor vehicle related incidents, including crashes (33) and driving under the influence (DUI, 7), were less frequent. BPD recorded 137 drug-related arrests in 2023. The average age of arrestees was 39 years

with a range of 15 to 67 years. Ninety-two (92) were male (67%), 41 were female (30%), and 1 was transgender (1%), and 2 had missing data (2%). Regarding race and ethnicity, 111 were identified as White (81%), 21 as Black (15%), 2 as American Indian or Alaska Native (2%), and 1 as Asian (1%), and 2 had missing data (1%). Among the White individuals, 2 were Hispanic.

Rates of Syringe Litter in the City of Burlington in 2023

Figure 6. Syringe litter reports by quarter³



Data gathered from reports submitted to the Burlington *See, Click, Fix* website, show 1,029 instances of reported syringe or other drug paraphernalia litter from January 1 through December 31, 2023. Data include any report to *See, Click, Fix* that detailed discarded needles, syringes, or other drug paraphernalia (e.g., glass

pipes) within the city of Burlington. The fewest reports took place during Quarter 1 (January – March) with 147 reports and the most were submitted during Quarter 3 (July-September) with 402 reports.

Emergency medical services response calls related to overdoses across Vermont in 2023⁴

Statewide, emergency medical services (EMS) responded to 1,981 calls related to overdoses (not including alcohol). In Burlington, EMS responded to 355 overdose calls, representing 18% of all EMS overdose responses in Vermont.

An important limitation of the data is that there may be duplicates in cases where a first response agency and a transporting ambulance agency responded to the same incident, and both documented the incident in the system.

² Data sources: [BPD Incidents Database](#) and [BPD Arrests Database](#)

³ Data source: [SeeClickFix Database](#)

⁴ Data source: Vermont Statewide Incident Reporting Network (SIREN)

Rate of syringe services program (SSP) participant uptake of treatment and recovery services in 2023⁵

Although the OPC may not necessarily be located at an existing syringe service program (SSP), using SSP data as a baseline for this measure allows us to see how a similar population is engaging with staff around the question of treatment readiness and treatment referrals. Statewide, 5,328 unduplicated individuals were served at SSPs. Of these, 805 (15%) were asked about readiness for treatment with medications for opioid use disorder and/or substance use disorder treatment (MOUD/SUD). Of those asked about MOUD/SUD treatment, 368 (46%) expressed readiness for treatment and were offered a referral. This represents 7% (368/5328) of the total number of individuals served at SSPs across Vermont.

In Burlington, of 2,107 unduplicated individuals served at SSPs, 165 (8%) were asked about readiness for MOUD/SUD treatment, 105 (64%) expressed readiness and were offered a referral. This represents 5% (105/2,107) of the total number of individuals served at SSPs in Burlington.

Rates of opioid-related medical needs across Vermont in 2023 focusing on endocarditis and strep A

In response to the legislative charge to evaluate the impact of the OPC pilot program on opioid-related medical needs, this report focuses on endocarditis and invasive group A strep (iGAS; often referred to as strep A) due to the increased risk for these two infections associated with injection drug use. Endocarditis and strep A are rare but potentially life-threatening infections that happen when bacteria get into parts of the body where they are not usually found, such as in the blood, muscles, heart or lungs. While strep A is a reportable disease in Vermont, endocarditis is not. As a result, data on endocarditis cases in this report are limited to those identified through Medicaid claims data. The cases of endocarditis and strep A infections shown in the tables below show the total number of cases in Vermont, which include those related to opioid use and those that are caused by something other than opioid use.

Table 1. Rates of endocarditis in Vermont by county of residence⁶

County	Rate per 10,000	County	Rate per 10,000
Addison	1.5	Lamoille	3.3
Bennington	10.3	Orange	1.6
Caledonia	6.1	Orleans	1.2
Chittenden	8.2	Rutland	10.0
Essex	5.7	Washington	5.7
Franklin	12.5	Windham	5.8
Grand Isle	0	Windsor	6.6

Endocarditis. Table 1 shows the 2023 rates of endocarditis diagnoses per 10,000 Medicaid recipients by county of residence for people aged 12-64. The rates are based on primary diagnosis in paid Medicaid claims. There were 95 total cases in the state, of which the highest number, 23 cases, were in Chittenden County. However, the highest rate (12.5 cases per 10,000 residents)

was observed in Franklin County. The overall rate in Vermont was 6.8 cases per 10,000 residents.

⁵ Data source: SSPY Grant Reporting from NEO 360

⁶ Data source: Medicaid Claims Data

Table 2. Number of cases of strep A infections in 2023 by county of residence⁷

County	Cases	County	Cases
Addison	4	Lamoille	1
Bennington	2	Orange	9
Caledonia	1	Orleans	5
Chittenden	51	Rutland	23
Essex	0	Washington	12
Franklin	3	Windham	15
Grand Isle	5	Windsor	13

Strep A. In 2023, there were 144 cases of strep A in Vermont. While Chittenden County had the most reported cases (See Table 2), Rutland County had a higher incidence rate (38.1 cases per 100,000 residents) compared to Chittenden County (30.1 cases per 100,000 residents). The overall rate in Vermont was 22.3 cases per

100,000 residents.

Conclusion or Recommendations

This report uses 2023 as the baseline for the Vermont OPC pilot program impact evaluation on overdose deaths, crime rates, syringe litter, EMS overdose responses, SSP treatment referrals, and opioid-related medical needs. In 2023, 26% of Vermont's overdose deaths occurred in Chittenden County, mostly in Burlington. Overdose was the most frequent drug-related incident for BPD. Chittenden County also had the highest number of cases of endocarditis and strep A, two types of infection associated with injection drug use. Among Burlington SSP participants who were asked about treatment readiness, over half indicated readiness and received a referral. Few participants are asked about treatment readiness, likely due to the brief interactions and time needed to build trust.

Planned Activities for 2025

The activities planned under the contract between the Department and PIRE depend on the outcome of SAFER's NIDA application and the timing of the OPC site determination and implementation. The anticipated activities include:

- The Department, PIRE and SAFER will finalize the measures and protocols for the OPC pilot program evaluation, including the measures required by the legislature.
- PIRE will conduct a feasibility assessment to identify the technical and operational needs for the OPC pilot program evaluation.
- PIRE will begin enrolling individuals that are currently receiving services at programs that serve people who use drugs in Burlington for baseline data collection for the evaluation study

⁷ Data source: [Increase in Invasive Group A Strep in Vermont, 2023](#)