



# Harm Reduction

## Meeting People Where They Are to Minimize Impacts of Drug Use

Opioids were involved in over two-thirds of all drug overdose deaths in the United States in 2017 and also contribute to other public health issues like hepatitis and HIV transmission.<sup>1</sup>

Harm reduction practices seek to minimize the negative impacts of drug use and drug policies.<sup>2</sup> Grounded in a human rights approach, harm reduction incorporates a wide array of approaches designed to meet people where they are and offer opportunities for people to improve their health and well-being.<sup>3</sup> These approaches include syringe access services, naloxone for opioid overdose reversals, supervised consumption services, and substance use treatment. An extensive and diverse body of research has shown the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of harm reduction interventions.

You can reduce public health risks and overdose deaths by partnering with RTI to design, evaluate, and implement harm reduction programs in your community. RTI can support your harm reduction initiatives, leveraging our extensive history of harm reduction research, including

- Observational studies to understand changing risk environments for people who use drugs
- Evaluations of innovative harm reduction interventions
- Implementation science studies to improve the implementation of evidence-based approaches.

Improve your understanding of the risks faced by people who use drugs and advance the implementation of evidence-based approaches to address those risks by partnering with our multidimensional harm reduction research team.

### More Information

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>

<sup>2</sup> Harm Reduction International. What is Harm Reduction? <https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>

<sup>3</sup> Harm Reduction Coalition. Principles of Harm Reduction. <https://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/>



## Project Highlights

**Preventing Opioid Overdose Mortality in the United States (National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)).** This implementation science study seeks to understand the levels of naloxone implementation within syringe service programs throughout the United States and to compare the effectiveness of different strategies to improve the quality and scale of naloxone delivery within syringe service programs.

**Innovative Solutions to Address the Opioid Epidemic: Supervised Injection Sites (Arnold Ventures).** This project evaluates an unsanctioned supervised injection site in the United States for people who inject drugs. This study integrates quantitative and qualitative research approaches to understand the impact of supervised injection services on reducing morbidity and mortality among people who use the services as well as improvements in the surrounding neighborhood.

**Individual and Structural Risk Factors for Opioid Overdose Associated with the Use and Supply of Illicitly Made Fentanyl (NIDA).** This ethnographic study is based in three communities with extremely high opioid overdose mortality rates in North Carolina. The goal of the study is to better understand how the introduction of fentanyl into the illicit drug supply has impacted drug use behaviors for people who use drugs.

**Optimizing Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution Delivery in the United States (NIDA).** This study will adapt the evidence-based systems analysis and improvement intervention and apply it to the delivery of naloxone within syringe services and opioid treatment programs in the United States. Systems Analysis and Improvement is an evidence-based intervention that combines assessment of a health program's cascade of care with quality improvement efforts to optimize the scale and quality of the program. This approach will build a program's ability to assess their naloxone delivery system, identify areas for improvement, and test approaches to optimize their program.

**The Impact of Naloxone Laws on Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution Programs and Overdose Mortality (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration).** This project assessed the impact of different types of state laws—designed to facilitate implementation of overdose education and naloxone distribution in various ways—on opioid overdose mortality rates throughout the United States.

**Addressing the Impacts of Injection Drug Use in Southern Appalachia (NIDA).** This project will assess opioid injection, HIV, acute Hepatitis C, and overdoses in rural western North Carolina to lay the groundwork for better care and treatment. In addition, this project will assess resources for providing care for people who use opioids in the region and will expand the capacity of clinics that treat hepatitis, HIV, and substance use through electronic medical record-driven screening and telehealth support.

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