

THEME: Harm Reduction

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY OVERDOSE DATA TO ACTION (OD2A): HARM REDUCTION

As stated by the National Coalition of Harm Reduction, “harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. It is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs.” In January 2021, the County of San Diego (County) Board of Supervisors requested that the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) develop a comprehensive harm reduction strategy. This effort would complement existing prevention and substance use disorder treatment services. One component of this strategy is the completion of a community readiness assessment to gather data crucial to establish and facilitate a harm reduction program that includes a syringe service programs (SSP) in San Diego County. The HIV, STD, Hepatitis Branch (HSHB), in the Public Health Services department of the County HHSA, contracted with San Diego State University Institute for Public Health to conduct this readiness assessment. This assessment intended to:

- Determine potential geographic locations for services.
- Understand the current level of knowledge among residents about syringe service programs and identify knowledge gaps.
- Identify organizations/groups that are supportive of syringe service programs.
- Detail successful implementation and operation of other syringe service programs, including ongoing challenges and strategies to address resident concerns.
- Make recommendations about the effective establishment of syringe service programs in San Diego County.
- Understand concerns of those who are not currently supportive of syringe service programs.

In November 2022, HSHB conducted the community assessment. The assessment revealed that the general public, as well as some staff/stakeholders, had very limited knowledge about harm reduction services that includes a SSP. The assessment also found that many community members and stakeholders interviewed across the County supported establishing a SSP. There were also indications of concern for a SSP, depending on the location, including retail centers and anywhere near where youth/children live or gather. Some participants in the assessment indicated that any SSP needs to be one option in a continuum of harm reduction services and serve as a “pathway to treatment.” The augmentation of substance use prevention services was also emphasized. The report includes a summary of concerns and potential benefits of a SSP. PHS has requested authorization from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Office of AIDS for SSP operations, where staff will obtain public comment and input from community stakeholder. The response from CDPH is anticipated to be received in August 2023. If approved, the County program will be one of several other community harm reduction programs. 🌱

What is Harm Reduction?

The overdose epidemic continues to affect communities nationwide, with illicit fentanyl driving a large proportion of the overdose deaths. In San Diego County, opioids are involved in the majority of overdose deaths. In 2021, opioids accounted for 71% of all San Diego County drug overdose deaths, with 743 of the 820 opioid deaths involving fentanyl. While overdose deaths are still elevated, preliminary 2022 data from the County of San Diego (County) Medical Examiner Office is promising.

Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm Reduction is an approach that focuses on people's strengths and offers opportunities to help individuals make positive behavior changes.

Harm reduction services and prevention strategies serve as critical components of the Continuum of Care and are necessary tools for addressing the opioid crisis. Harm reduction emphasizes *meeting people where they are* and focuses on building trust and encouraging participants to return. It emphasizes engaging directly with people who use drugs to prevent overdose and disease transmission, improve the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of those served, and offers low-threshold options for accessing substance use disorder treatment and other health care services.



In June 2021, County of San Diego Board of Supervisors voted to allow harm reduction programs in the unincorporated areas, overturning a previous ban. In addition, the Board directed County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) to create a **Comprehensive Harm Reduction Strategy** for the County in response to rising substance use-related fatalities. The Comprehensive Harm Reduction Strategy is based in multidisciplinary evidence and built upon years of foundational efforts by local regional stakeholders who have worked to mitigate the harms to residents, families, and communities related to misuse of prescribed and illicit opioids. Distribution of naloxone, a proven opioid overdose-reversing medication, and development and implementation of harm reduction programs are among the many tactics outlined in the strategy for safe and effective mitigation of harms related to substance misuse.

With the support of Overdose to Data Action (OD2A) grant funds, on July 1, 2022, the County of San Diego executed a contract with the Harm Reduction Coalition of San Diego (HRCSD) to expand the County of San Diego Naloxone Distribution Program (NDP) and saturate the community with naloxone. Through the County's NDP, efforts to make naloxone accessible and get it into the hands of everyone who needs it are underway. This is more crucial than ever since we know that at least 2 people die of an opioid overdose every single day in San Diego County. Naloxone distribution efforts include the facilitation of targeted outreach and educational training events, the expansion of the County's naloxone distribution provider network and the implementation of naloxone vending machines throughout the County.

Additionally, OD2A grant funds have supported ongoing efforts to both expand community awareness of and improve linkages to care for people who use drugs (PWUD). Such efforts include the facilitation of a linkage to care learning collaborative for providers serving individuals at risk for overdose. The learning collaborative has provided opportunities for providers to share resources and build referral pathways that include harm reduction programs. Harm reduction programs offer a range of services to meet the needs of PWUD, including but not limited to, the provision of sterile syringes and the collection and disposal of used syringes. In addition, feedback regarding existing barriers and/or gaps to rapid and accessible care for PWUD are being captured and will be used to inform the County's continued linkage to care efforts. 🌈

FREE OPIOID TRAINING COURSE WITH CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

The County of San Diego, Public Health department has partnered with Champions for Health and The Doctor's Company to develop a self-paced academic detailing curriculum for health care professionals. The curriculum is entitled *Innovations and Smart Approaches in Safe Prescribing* and is comprised of a series of on-demand courses, free of charge.

Course content includes eliminating internal bias regarding opioid use disorder, providing alternatives to opioids, safe prescribing of opioids, and treatment of substance use disorder.

Other topics include opioid stewardship, benzodiazepine stewardship, opioid and benzodiazepine tapering, and naloxone instruction.

These training tools can be accessed online. To date, more than 53 prescribers have utilized this curriculum.

If interested in learning more about substance use disorder (SUD), SUD treatment & safe opioid prescribing, please view our [Academic Detailing curriculum](#). Participants can obtain CME credit upon completion. 🌟

Schedule a FREE consult with a safe prescribing expert!

Would you like an opportunity to engage in a personalized, virtual, one-on-one Q&A with a safe prescribing expert? Sessions are about 30 minutes and completely customizable to fit your schedule. Topics available include safe and practical alternatives to opioids, benzodiazepine stewardship, opioid and benzodiazepine tapering, buprenorphine training, and naloxone.

If you are interested in scheduling a session, please contact Katy Rogers at katy.rogers@championsfh.org or (619) 508-4460. 🌟

Healthcare Systems Survey

We are asking physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, dental practitioners, and pharmacists to participate in a needs assessment survey for the County of San Diego Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) grant. The purpose of this survey is to assess licensed health care provider's perceptions of prescription drug use and prescribing opioids. Your feedback will provide valuable insight for the development of opioid stewardship recommendations and best practices for our region.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes of your time. Your responses will remain confidential and will be grouped with those of other respondents for reporting.

Please use the link below to take the survey **by August 15, 2023**.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GXQ5FZS> 🌟



County of San Diego Harm Reduction Strategies *Naloxone Distribution Program—Vending Machines*

Strategy 5

Since the placement of the first naloxone vending machine on March 2, 2023, a total of **740** naloxone kits have been dispensed.

Efforts have been completed to establish partnerships and coordinate machine placements for 12 vending machine units. Behavioral Health Services (BHS) has coordinated efforts with the County of San Diego Sheriff Department, which will serve as a partner site for four additional vending machines. Each machine to be placed at a different County jail, by August 31, 2023. 🌈

Vending Machine Placement

To date, all **12** of the original naloxone vending machines have been placed at the following locations:

1. McAlister Institute: 1180 Third Ave, Chula Vista, CA 91911
2. T.H.E. C.I.R.C.L.E. by Epiphany: 5081 Logan Avenue, San Diego, California 92113
3. El Dorado: 1733 Euclid Ave, San Diego, CA 92105-5414
4. Pala Reservation: 34884 Lilac Extension Rd, Pala, CA 92059-2903
5. Rincon Reservation: 33750 Valley Center Rd, Valley Center, CA 92082-6022
6. Yaytaanak Wellness Center: 1389 Browns Rd, Alpine, CA 91901
7. Acadia Health Clinic: 7545 Metropolitan Drive, San Diego, CA 92108
8. Jane Westin Center: 1045 9th Ave, San Diego, CA 92101
9. Southern Indian Health Council: 36350 Church Rd, Campo, CA 91906
10. Project A.W.A.R.E.: 2733 Lemon Grove Ave, Lemon Grove, CA 91945
11. Father Joe's: 1501 Imperial Ave, San Diego, CA 92101
12. Acadia Healthcare: 1905 Apple Street, STE 3, Oceanside, CA 92054 🌈



*Naloxone vending machine located at
T.H.E. C.I.R.C.L.E. by Epiphany in San Diego, CA.*

For additional information on naloxone or the County of San Diego naloxone vending machines, please scan the QR code below.



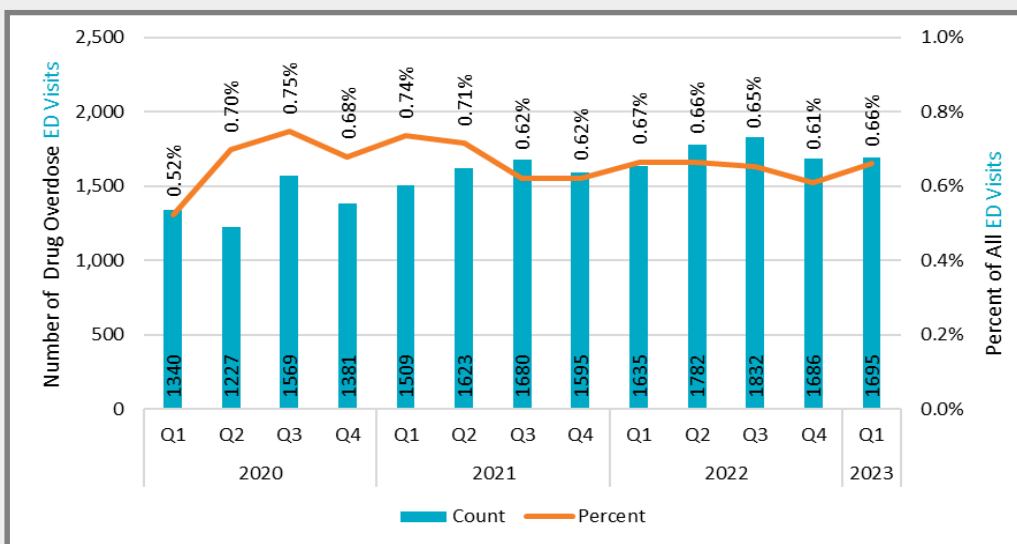
For more information on how to receive a naloxone training, access naloxone, or become a naloxone distribution provider, contact the County of San Diego Behavioral Health Services Harm Reduction Team at HarmReduction.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Drug Overdose Surveillance in San Diego County

Strategy 3

The Epidemiology and Immunization Services Branch (EISB) in the Public Health Services department, of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, is planning the launch of a Overdose Surveillance and Response (OSAR) Unit. Several data sources will be utilized, including near-real-time, emergency department (ED) data from 16 hospitals; near-real time suspected overdose surveillance data from the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy's [High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program](#) (HIDTA); mortality data from the California [Vital Records Business Intelligence System](#) (VRBIS); and non-fatal ED and non-fatal inpatient hospitalization discharge data, from [California Department of Health Care Access and Information](#) (HCAI). EISB routinely monitors the near-real-time, ED data through a weekly trend report and daily and weekly aberration detection protocols. 🌟

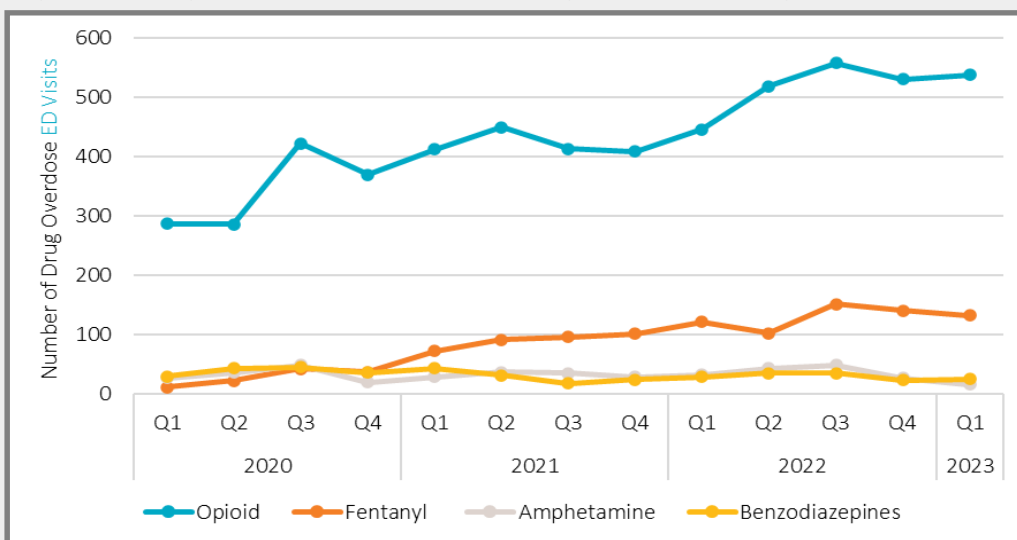
Figure 1. Emergency Department Visits for Drug Overdose by Year, Q1 2020 - Q1 2023.



- Figure 1** shows the number of all drug overdose related ED visits increased by 26% from Quarter 1* 2020 to Quarter 1 2023.

*Calendar Year

Figure 2. Emergency Department Visits for Drug Overdose by Drug* by Year, Q1 2020 - Q1 2023.



- Figure 2** displays the number of ED overdose visits by select drugs. Opioid and fentanyl overdose ED visits were 1.9 and 12.0 times higher, respectively, from Quarter 1,* 2020 to Quarter 1* 2023.

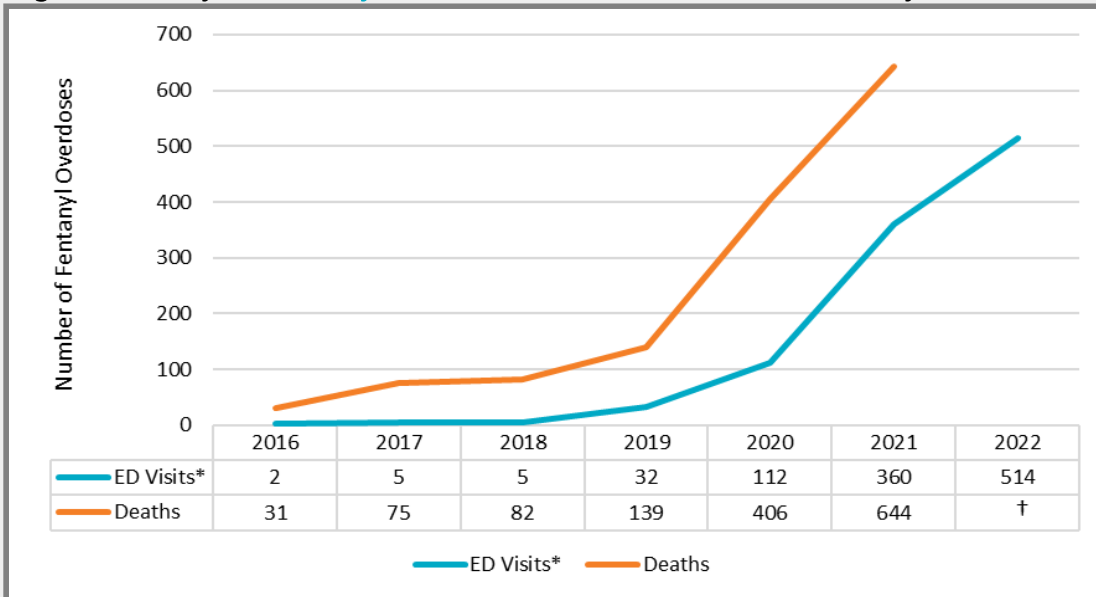
*Calendar Year

*Drugs are categorized based on key words in chief complaint data and ICD-10 diagnostic codes when available. They may not represent the final diagnosis. Categories are not mutually exclusive; a single ED visit may involve more than one drug category.

Source: Figure 1 & 2: Prepared by County of San Diego Epidemiology and Immunization Services Branch, 2023. Presented in the [Overdose Quarterly Report](#). The next issue of the quarterly report will be published in July 2023.

Each edition of the [Overdose Quarterly Report](#) features a different specific topic. The ‘feature topic’ for the last report, issued in [April 2023](#), was fentanyl overdose. The fentanyl overdose section of the report, as shown in examples on this page, focused on fatal and non-fatal fentanyl overdose trends within San Diego County. 🌍

Figure 3. Fentanyl Overdose Syndromic Surveillance ED Visits* and Deaths by Year.

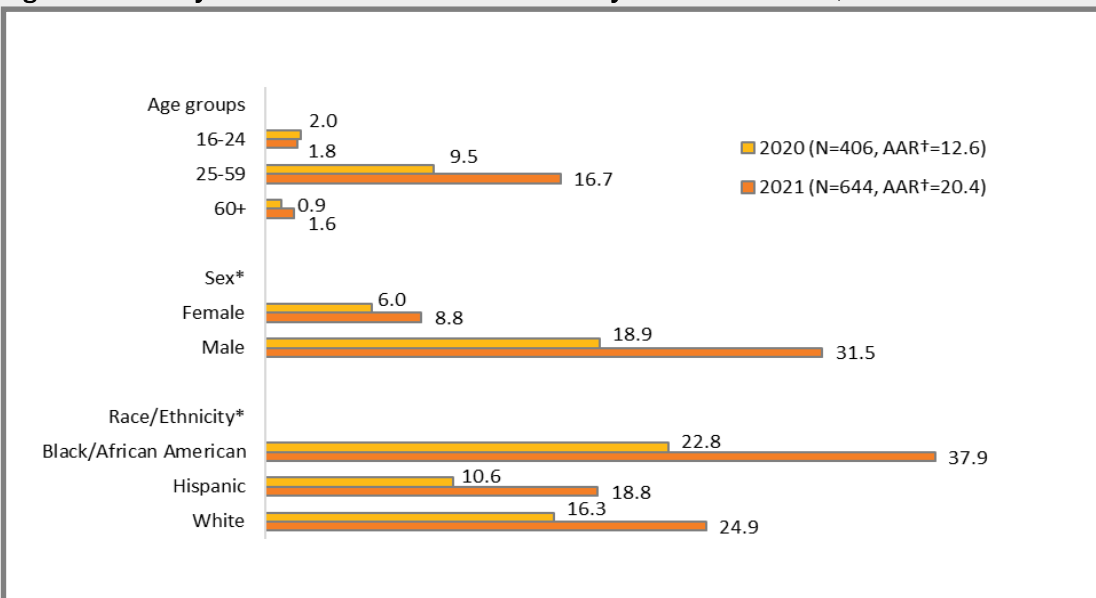


- **Figure 3** Fentanyl overdose deaths increased 59% from 2020 to 2021 and ED visits increased 43% from 2021 to 2022.

*County of San Diego ED Syndromic Surveillance Data.

† Mortality data for 2022 are not yet available.

Figure 4. Rates by Selected Characteristics of Fentanyl Overdose Deaths, 2020 - 2021.



- **Figure 4** The demographic groups with the highest age-adjusted rates of fentanyl-related deaths were those aged 25-59, males, and persons of Black/African American race.

Note: Data for other demographic groups cannot be presented due to small numbers (<15).

*Rates by sex and race/ethnicity are age-adjusted.

†Age-Adjusted Rates (AAR).

Source: Figure 3 & 4: Prepared by County of San Diego Epidemiology and Immunization Services Branch, 2023. Presented in the [Overdose Quarterly Report](#). The next issue of the quarterly report will be published in July 2023.

Coming soon: [Overdose Surveillance Quarterly Report, Q2 2023](#)

CURES 2.0

Use and Utility Survey

Strategy 4

The County of San Diego launched the *Controlled Substances Utilization Review and Evaluation System (CURES 2.0) Use and Utilization Survey* in October 2022. This survey was developed to capture understanding and use of CURES 2.0 and its tools among healthcare providers and pharmacists.

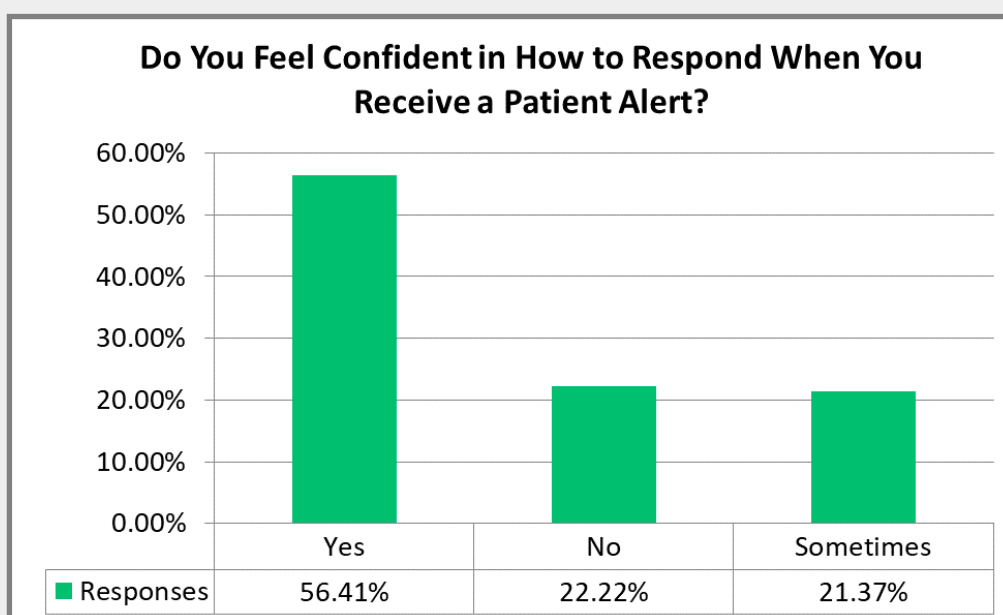
The survey was open for five months and received 269 individual responses. Survey respondents were mostly male (54%), White or Caucasian (70%), >60 years of age (40%), primary care specialty (45%), >25 years of experience (49%), located in 92103 (11%) and 92037 (9%), and worked in large, private health systems (44%).

Most respondents (64%) were able to access CURES 2.0 through their electronic health records system (EHR). However, most (55%) stated that their EHR did not allow access to CURES 2.0 without leaving the EHR. A number of respondents noted in the comments that the system was tedious to use or that CURES should be better integrated within their EHR.

Most respondents (56%) felt confident in responding to a patient alert on CURES 2.0. The patient activity reports were one of the more commonly used features in CURES 2.0, with many respondents indicating that they run these reports every time they prescribe an opioid. Respondents rarely used the other features, particularly those on peer-to-peer communication, reporting stolen prescriptions, patient safety alerts/messaging, delegation authority, or patient-provider agreements.

The results of the survey highlight the need for further education on CURES 2.0 and CURES' features and provided insight into providers' experience with the system and its perceived usefulness. The survey was recently re-opened for dentists and oral surgeons to gain greater understanding of the needs and experience of dental health providers with CURES 2.0. 🌐

Figure 5. Example of a Question and Responses from the *CURES 2.0 Use and Utility Survey*.



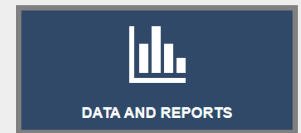
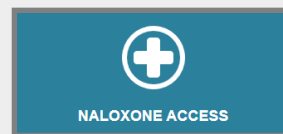
Source: *Controlled Substances Utilization Review and Evaluation System (CURES 2.0) Use and Utilization Survey*

Webpage Updates



The [April 2023 issue of the Overdose Quarterly Report](#), created by the County of San Diego Epidemiology and Immunization Services Branch, is available on the [OD2A webpage](#) in the [Data and Reports](#) section. The report includes data on drug overdoses by drug, opioid overdoses by sex, age, race/ethnicity, region of residence, and other demographics. Additionally, fentanyl overdoses is the issue's feature topic.

To access additional data, reports, and resources for the community and providers, please visit WWW.SANDIEGOCOUNTY.GOV/OD2A.



Overdose Data To Action Surveillance & Prevention Grant Strategies



Surveillance Strategy

- **Innovative Surveillance Strategy:** Focus on new and innovative ways to collect data on drug misuse and overdose tailored to a community's needs. (Strategy 3)

Prevention Strategies

- **Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs):** Better utilize prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) data to inform prescribing practices. (Strategy 4)
- **State and Local Integration:** Improve state and local prevention efforts to build more effective and sustainable surveillance and implement community-level interventions. (Strategy 5)
- **Linkage to Care:** Ensure people are connected to the care they need by leveraging systems and upstream prevention efforts. Such as, developing a system to track care connections to Medication Assisted Treatment for individuals experiencing nonfatal overdoses. (Strategy 6)
- **Provider and Health Systems Support:** Support healthcare providers and health systems with drug overdose prevention and response, including expanding the use of evidence-based prescribing and treatment practices. (Strategy 7)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OPIOID OVERDOSE PREVENTION IN
SAN DIEGO COUNTY

PLEASE VISIT: WWW.SANDIEGOCOUNTY.GOV/OD2A

FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, OR SUGGESTIONS,

PLEASE EMAIL:

PHS.OD2A@sdcounty.ca.gov

The Public Health Services department, in the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), in collaboration with HHSA Behavioral Health Services department, would like to thank the medical community for their efforts and support during the opioid epidemic. While the County is seeing a decrease in the morphine milligram equivalent (MME) dosage and the overall number of opioids prescribed in San Diego County, the medical community must remain vigilant and persistent as the illicit opioid-related overdose numbers continue to climb. It is the intent of this OD2A grant to promote efforts in opioid surveillance, prevention, linkages to care, and treatment to reduce overdoses related to opioid prescription drugs, as well as reduce illicit opioid drug use.

***The Overdose Data to
Action (OD2A)***

Quarterly Newsletter

is published by the Public Health Services Department, in the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency.

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This newsletter is produced as a result of funding from the CDC Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) grant with a focus on five surveillance & prevention strategies. These activities are implemented by Public Health Services (PHS) and Behavioral Health Services (BHS).

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