

PRINCIPLES OF TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION (THR)

Applying harm reduction to tobacco use with respect, science, and justice

WHAT IS TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION?

Tobacco Harm Reduction (THR) applies harm reduction principles to tobacco use. It recognizes while quitting all tobacco and nicotine use is the safest option, many people struggle to achieve or maintain complete abstinence. THR aims to minimize health risks associated with combustible tobacco use by meeting people where they are without judgement, shame, or stigma.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF THR:

Meet people where they are.

Respect people who use nicotine or tobacco as the experts in their own lives. Build trust and provide safer options without judgment.

Focus on reducing harm, not demanding abstinence.

Recognizing switching from combustion to non-combustible nicotine products can significantly lower health risks, even if use continues.

Address inequities.

Poverty, stress, stigma, and limited access to cessation support all shape tobacco use. THR seeks equitable access to safer options.

Empower through accurate information.

Correct myths about nicotine. Distinguish between the drug and smoke that cause disease. People have the right to science-based, judgment-free education.

Support autonomy and choice.

Quitting entirely, cutting down, or switching to safer products are all valid goals. People deserve options that fit their health, culture, and context.

INTEGRATING THR IN TRADITIONAL HARM REDUCTION SETTINGS AND SUD TREATMENT STRATEGIES:

1. Offer safer nicotine options alongside traditional harm reduction services.
2. Train staff to provide accurate information on nicotine vs. combustion.
3. Include people who use nicotine in program design and messaging.
4. Integrate THR education into syringe services programs (SSPs), housing settings, Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs), and Outpatient Treatment Programs (OTPs).

Why it matters:

THR expands harm reduction beyond illicit drugs, applying the same compassion and evidence-based approach to tobacco use. It promotes informed choice, reduces health disparities, and honors the dignity and autonomy of people who use nicotine.

Want to learn more? Reach out to Gaby Zabala Alemán at zabala.aleman@harmreduction.org

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FOR MORE RESOURCES, VISIT [HARMREDUCTION.ORG](https://harmreduction.org)

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Sources:

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