

CENTER Harm Reduction *California*

Community Engagement Network To Expand Resources, or CENTER Harm Reduction, is a three year statewide initiative to expand, develop and deepen harm reduction services throughout California.



Photo: CASEP 2018 National Harm Reduction Conference in New Orleans

What is the harm reduction landscape in California? Currently,* there are 46 authorized syringe service programs (SSPs) throughout the state. California has SSPs in 27 of the 58 Counties, leaving over half of the state without these life saving harm reduction services. Even in areas that do offer services, many cannot meet the demands of their communities due to staffing limitations, funding, and/or geographic barriers. Despite new initiatives and increased federal resources, progress in California towards reducing overdose and scaling up harm reduction services remains unacceptably slow. While California overdose rates are lower than many other states, we still had 2,196 opioid overdose deaths reported in 2017. These overdose rates continue to impact our most vulnerable residents, including street based people who use drugs and communities of color, especially Native Americans.

What are Syringe Service Programs?

SSPs offer sterile syringes and supplies, like naloxone, alcohol wipes, tourniquets, hygiene kits and condoms, to people who use drugs. They also can include a range of other services like wound care, HIV and Hepatitis C testing and referrals to treatment. SSPs have been operating in California for at least the past 20 years and are known to reduce the spread of infectious diseases, lower overdose rates and help connect people to services. **Most importantly, they offer a compassionate social connection for some of our most vulnerable communities.**

California has invested money into critical services, like naloxone and medication assisted treatment (MAT) expansion, yet despite government investment and increased awareness of harm reduction strategies, action is often constrained by broader community stigma towards people who use drugs and misunderstandings about the role and nature of harm reduction.

The CENTER Harm Reduction initiative will connect and convene providers across California to discuss community solutions to reduce overdose deaths, infectious disease, and structural violence, in order to improve the health and well-being of people who use drugs.

We have identified four key areas of focus to achieve these goals. They are...



TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

We will provide training and tailored technical assistance to syringe service programs, and other harm reduction service providers throughout California, in order to increase capacity of these programs.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING & MOBILIZATION

We will host six community convenings, bringing together a variety of stakeholders, in 6 high needs regions of California. These convenings will work to build understanding and support for the core values, principles, and strategies of harm reduction and promote collective action towards implementing and expanding services for people who use drugs.



NATIONAL AND STATE CONFERENCES

We will provide conference opportunities each year of the initiative. In 2019, we will host a California Syringe Exchange Program (CASEP) Conference, in 2020, we will offer limited scholarships to financially support Californians to attend the National Harm Reduction Conference in Puerto Rico, and in 2021 we will host the first ever statewide California harm reduction conference.



CULTURALLY RELEVANT RESOURCES

We will develop culturally relevant resources on a dedicated page for Californians to access service information and translate existing materials into Spanish to respond to the needs of marginalized communities in California

To learn more about our work visit:
<https://harmreduction.org/our-work/california/>