

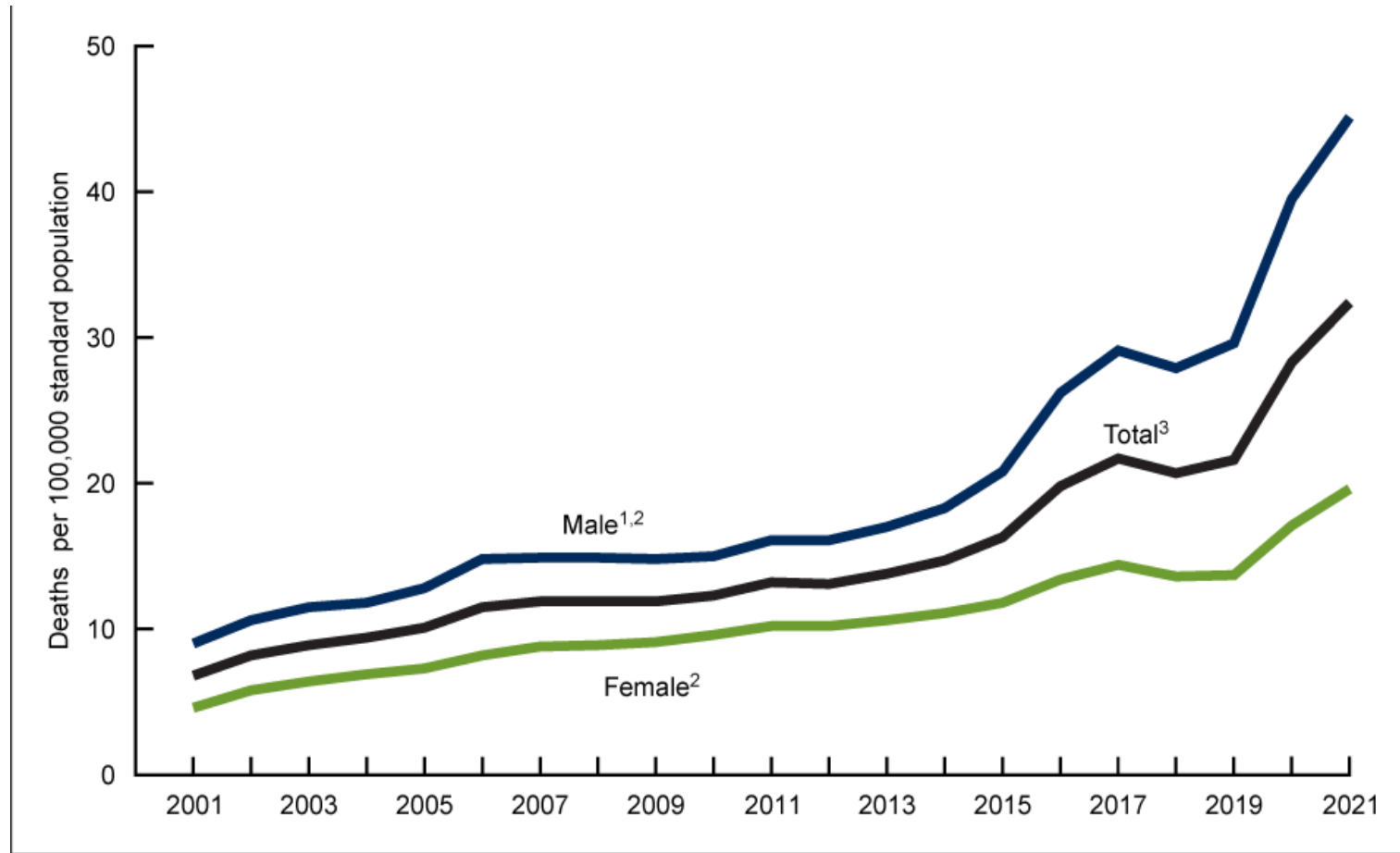
Harm Reduction: Let's Do What Works

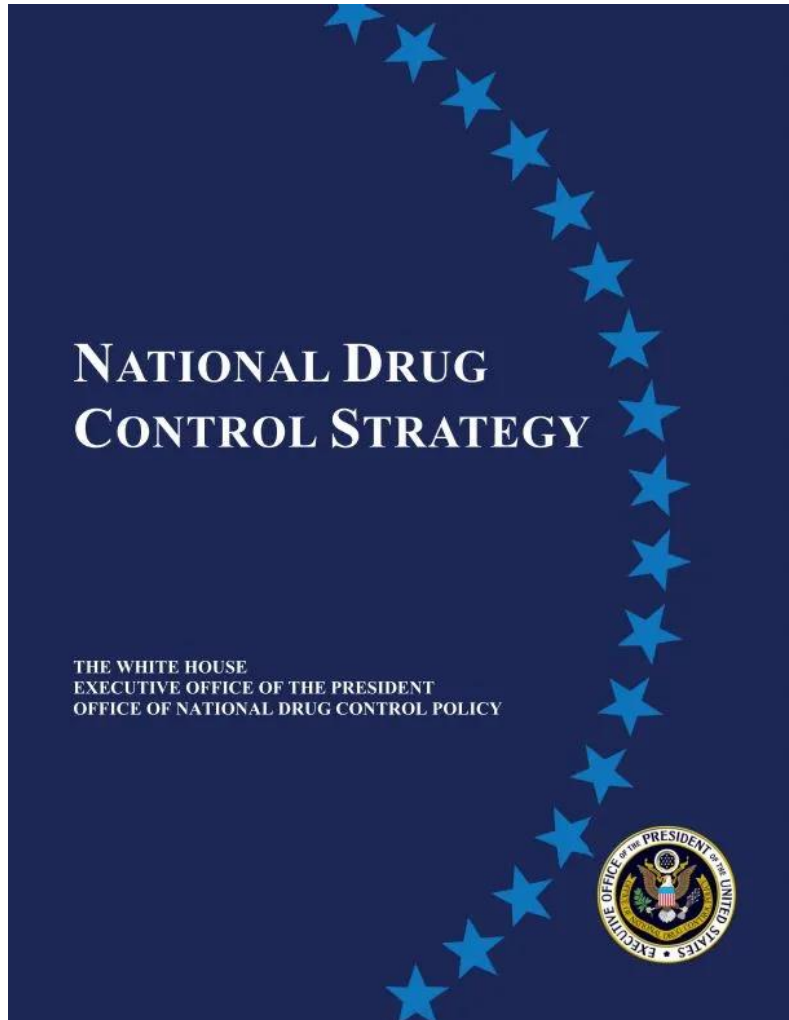
Robin A. Pollini, PhD MPH
Professor

Positionality Statement

- I conduct research on injection drug use, its health impacts, and access to harm reduction services
- I collaborate with harm reduction programs to inform and conduct my research
- I am a harm reduction volunteer
- States where I have conducted research and/or volunteered include California, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and West Virginia (as well as Washington DC and Tijuana, Mexico)

Overdose Deaths: Age-Adjusted Rate by Sex, 2001-2021





“Saving Lives is Our North Star”

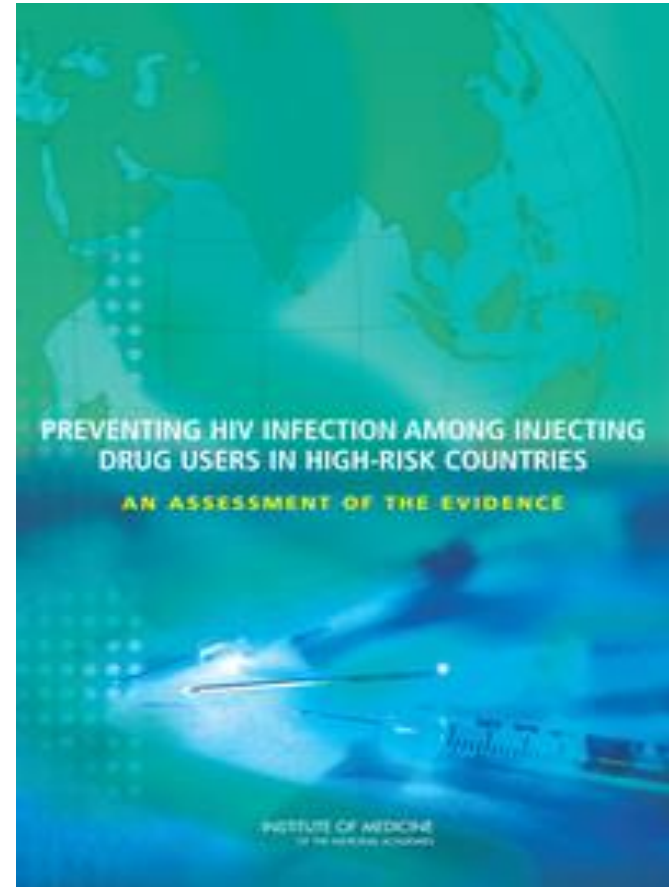
The 2022 National Drug Control Strategy for the first time acknowledges harm reduction as an integral part of saving lives in the context of substance use

Harm Reduction – What Is It?

- A set of practical strategies and ideas delivered in low barrier settings to reduce the negative consequences associated with substance use
 - HIV/HCV
 - Soft tissue infections
 - Systemic bacterial infections
 - Overdose
- } Sterile syringes/SSPs
- } Naloxone, test strips, OPCs
- An approach that meets people “where they’re at” in their substance use without judgment
 - A philosophy that embraces “any positive change” as defined by each individual

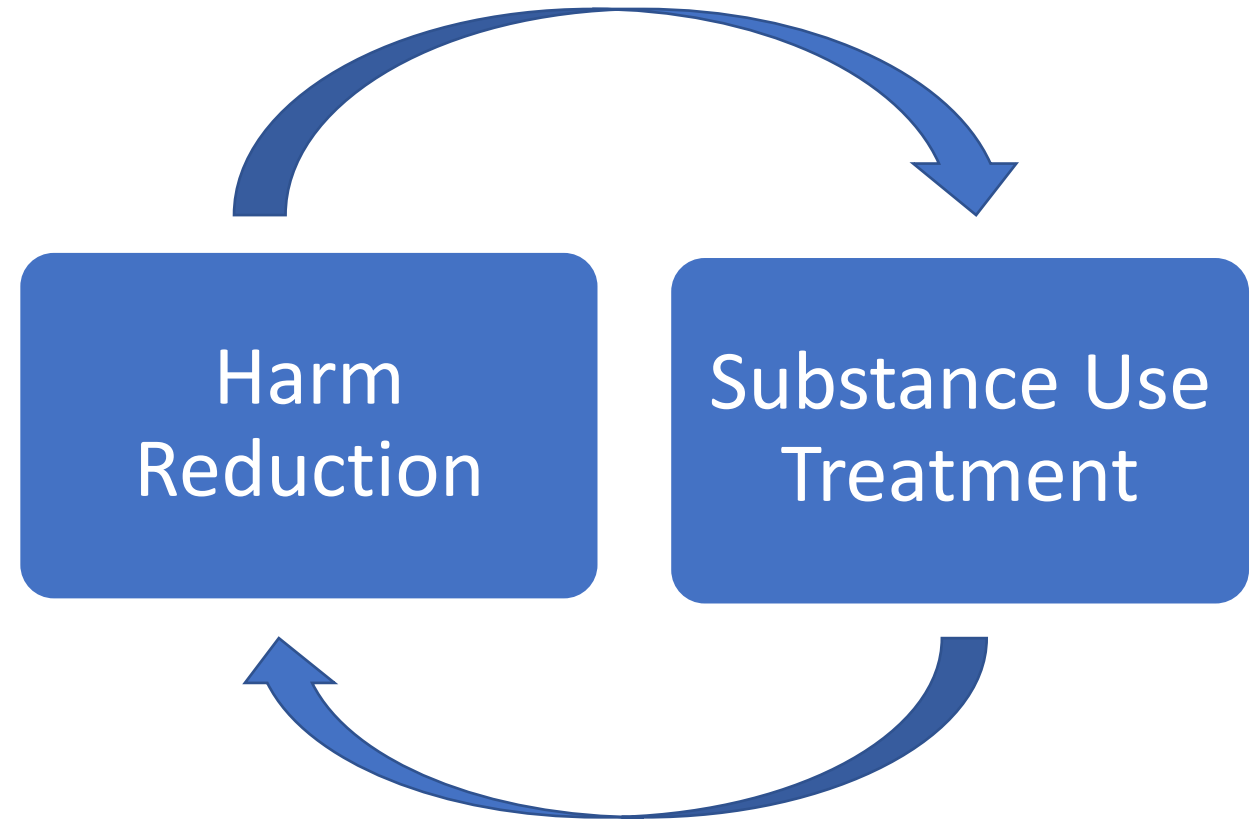
Scientific Evidence - SSPs

- SSPs DO reduce unsafe injection and injection-related infections like HIV
- Syringe services programs DO NOT increase discarded syringes or number of drug users, expand drug use networks, change crime trends



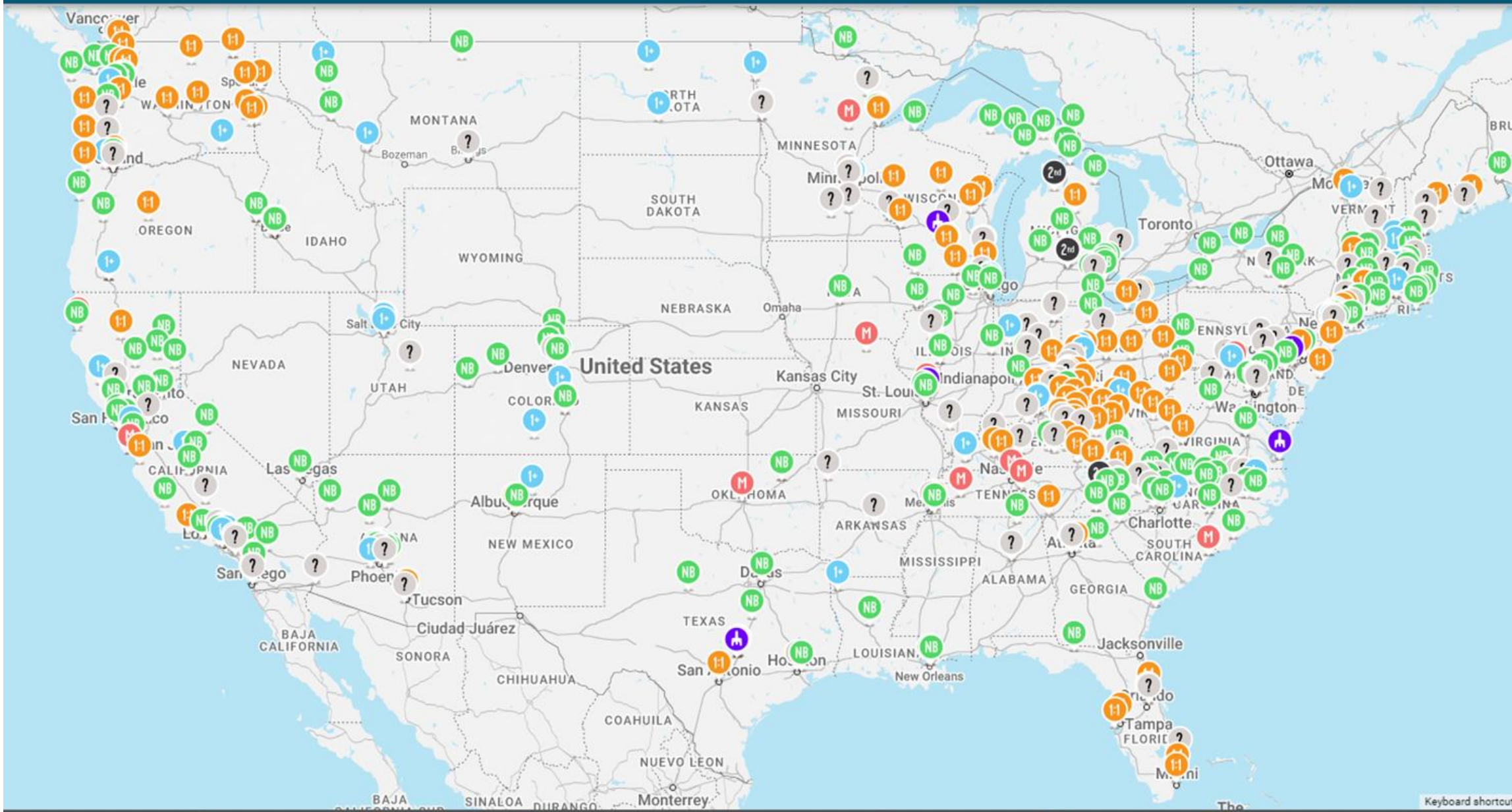
Scientific Evidence - SSPs

- SSPs participants are more likely to engage in treatment, reduce injection, and stop injecting altogether



NASEN

A DAVE PURCHASE INITIATIVE



Keyboard shortcut



Undisclosed



One-to-one



One+



Need-based



Secondary



Mobile



Naloxone

SSP Expansion Challenges

- State and local laws prohibiting or restricting SSP operations
- Small budgets
- Federal funding for syringe purchase banned since 1988
 - Extended to pipes and other smoking devices in 2022



Photo by L. Peace

Naloxone Access Barriers



Photo by C. Cordwell

- OTC approval for NARCAN[®] creates a two-tiered system
 - OTC status for all formulations would improve access
- Cost considerations
- Other considerations for OTC NARCAN[®]
 - Pharmacy stock
 - Pharmacy placement

Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs)

- Provide safe use supplies, medical supervision, and comprehensive services
- Effective in reducing overdose deaths, HIV, and public injection and increasing treatment engagement
- Do not increase publicly discarded syringes or crime
- Two sanctioned centers in the US (NYC)

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)

- Buprenorphine, methadone, naltrexone
 - Buprenorphine and methadone are the “gold standard”
- MOUD treatment is overdose prevention
 - 76% reduction in opioid overdose
 - 82% reduction in opioid overdose deaths
- In 2021, only 22% of people with OUD received treatment with MOUD in the past year

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)

- Methadone treatment barriers
 - Limited to federally regulated opioid treatment programs (OTPs)
 - ~2000 OTPs operating in US
 - Limited access for rural communities
 - Restrictions on take-home dosing
 - Modified to allow take-home dosing during COVID-19 Public Health Emergency
 - Modification temporarily extended by SAMHSA
- Allowing office-based prescribing would increase access to methadone treatment, especially in rural communities

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)

- Buprenorphine treatment barriers
 - Historically, X-waiver
 - Special DEA registration, patient caps
 - Eliminated by the MAT Act (December 2022)
- Optimizing the impact of the MAT Act
 - Prescribers – need to prescribe
 - Pharmacies – need to dispense
 - Telemedicine

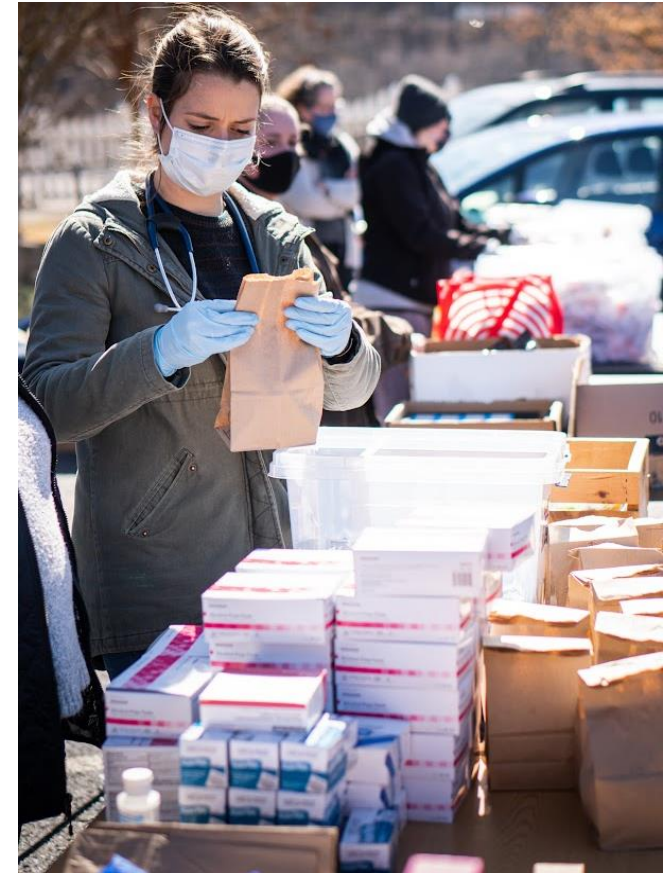


Photo by C. Cordwell

Summary



Photo by L. Peace

Progress

- NARCAN[®] OTC status
- X-waiver elimination

Challenges

- SSP funding limitations
- Naloxone prescription status and cost
- Limited OPCs
- Methadone limited to OTPs

Recommendations

- Pursue parity in harm reduction funding
- Repeal ban on federal funding for safe use supplies
- Support OTC status for all naloxone products
- State clear federal support for OPCs
- Liberate methadone from the OTP system
- Make permanent the methadone take-home and buprenorphine telemedicine policies started under the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency