

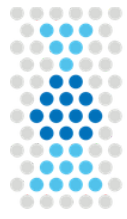
MATTERS[®]
Medication for Addiction Treatment & Electronic Referrals

Harm Reduction 101: An Introduction

 mattersnetwork.org

 765-MATTERS (628-8377)





MATTERS[®]
Medication for Addiction Treatment & Electronic Referrals



Who We Are

Meet MATTERS

MATTERS was created to effectively link people with substance use disorder to treatment and resources within their own community.

Our program was founded in Buffalo, NY in 2016 but has since expanded across New York State and into neighboring states.

What is MATTERS?

Our rapid referral platform is used to efficiently link individuals with opioid use disorder to medication-assisted treatment programs **24/7, 365 days a year**, and supports patient success through various other resources including harm reduction.

www.mattersnetwork.org



Learning Objectives

At the end of this session, participants will



Understand the
history and principles
of harm reduction



Discuss the dangers of
contaminants in the
drug supply



Identify future
directions of the harm
reduction movement

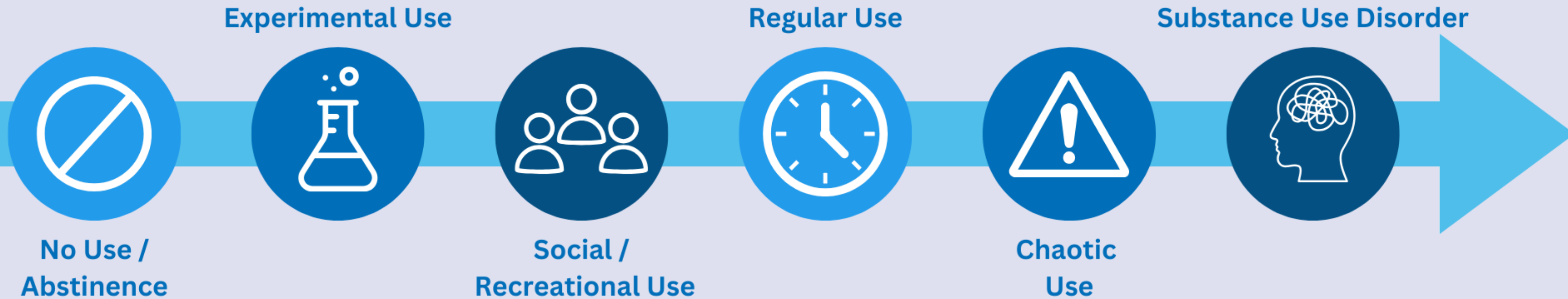


Everyday Harm Reduction Practices

Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies used to reduce the risks associated with any health behavior, including drug use.

We utilize harm reduction strategies in our everyday lives without even knowing!





Did You Know?

Only 25% of people who use illicit substances develop substance use disorder (SUD). However, only 10% of people with SUD receive treatment.

Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change

6 **Relapse**
Fall back into old patterns of behavior

5 **Maintenance**
Sustained change; new behavior replaces old

4 **Action**
Active modification of behavior



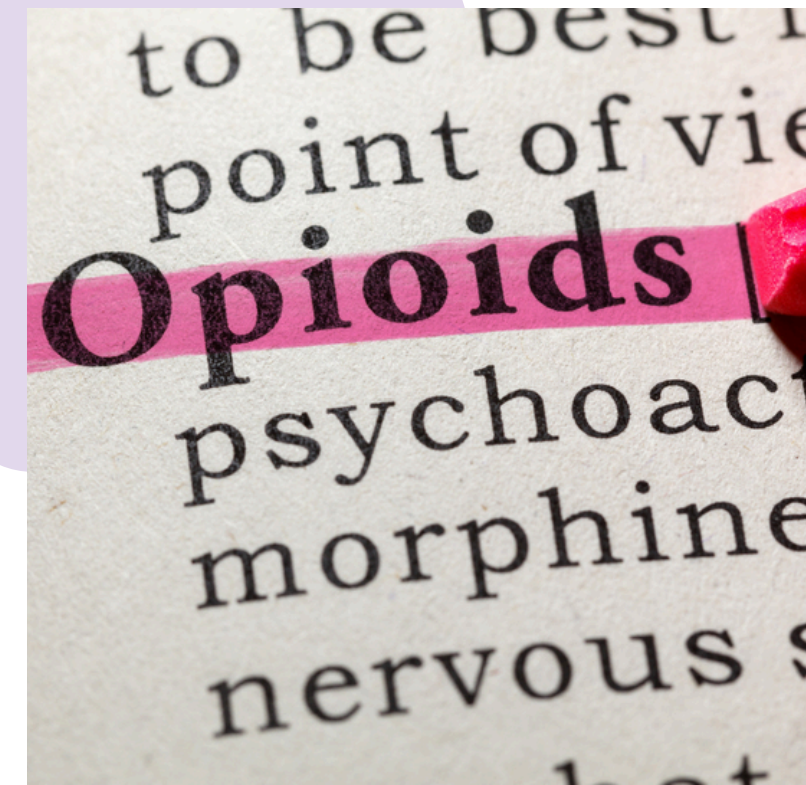
1 **Precontemplation**
No intention of changing behavior

2 **Contemplation**
Aware of problem with no commitment to action

3 **Preparation**
Intent on taking action to address issue

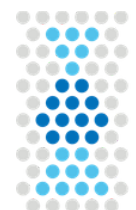
What Are Opioids?

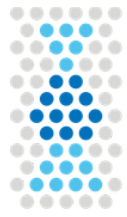
Natural or synthetic substances that act on the brain
, often used to treat chronic or severe pain



Why Are Opioids a Risk?

Opioids are extremely addictive substances. Taking too many at a time can lead to respiratory depression, which can result in death.





Fentanyl: What is it?

Fentanyl is a potent, synthetic opioid that is commonly mixed into heroin and other drugs (ie. cocaine, methamphetamines).



Did You Know?

- Fentanyl is **30 - 50x more potent than heroin** and **80 - 100x more potent than morphine.**
- Fentanyl is **illegal when not prescribed** by a healthcare professional





Medical vs. Illicit Fentanyl

Medical Fentanyl

In healthcare settings, there are **multiple safety precautions** in place when administering fentanyl. It has **fewer side effects** than other opioids and it **can be administered intranasally**, which is less invasive.

Illicit Fentanyl

Street fentanyl is often found **in highly concentrated doses** (“chocolate chip cookie effect”) in other substances, leading to **unintentional overdoses**.

88%

Nationwide

Opioid overdose deaths
involved fentanyl in 2021

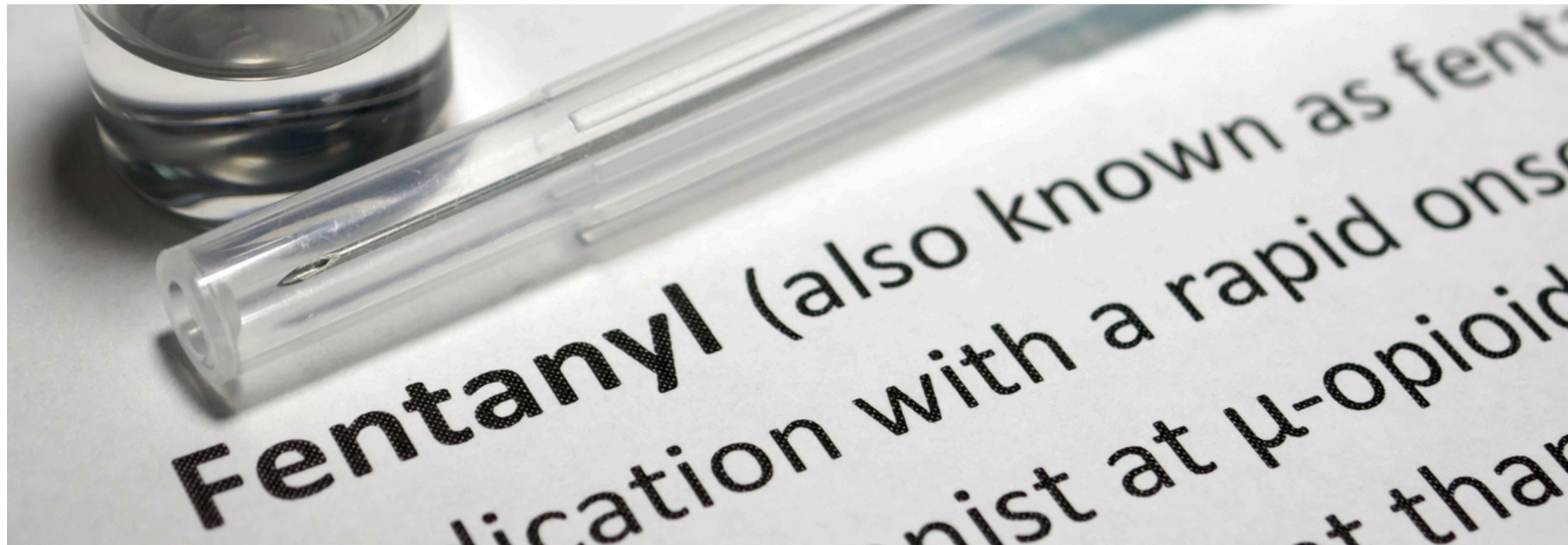
92%

New York State

Opioid overdose deaths
involved fentanyl in 2021

Fast Facts on Fentanyl

Fentanyl contamination in the drug supply has become so common that **pure heroin is extremely rare**. This combination of heroin and fentanyl is called **“dope”**.



65%

Erie County, NY

Opioid overdose deaths
in 2024 involved cocaine

Xylazine: What is it?

Xylazine, a.k.a. 'Tranq', is an FDA-approved veterinary sedative that is commonly mixed with drugs like fentanyl to lengthen their euphoric effects.



Did You Know?

- Xylazine is relatively easy to access online or in veterinary settings.
- It lowers blood pressure and respiration, resulting in loss of consciousness for hours and an increased risk of overdose.





More Information on Xylazine

Non-Opioid

Xylazine is not an opioid and, therefore, **does not respond to naloxone** (Narcan). However, xylazine is often mixed with other opioids, so using Narcan can still save a life!

Toxic to Humans

Exposure to xylazine is associated with **severe skin wounds** that, when left untreated, can lead to amputation. These wounds can appear all over the body.



More Information on Xylazine

WARNING!

Graphic images on the next slide

Opioid

is not an opioid and, therefore, **does not respond** to Narcan (naloxone). However, xylazine is often mixed with opioids, so using Narcan can still save a life!

associated with **severe skin wounds** that can lead to amputation. These wounds can be very painful and can affect the body.

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

6/23/22



8/8/22



9/8/22



1/3/23



5/22/23



7/8/23



2/8/24



6/4/24



7/30/24



-
-
-
-
-
-

600%
Nationwide

Increase in xylazine-positive overdose deaths between 2020-2021

12%
New York State

Opioid overdose deaths involved xylazine (including NYC) in 2021

Fast Facts on Xylazine

Xylazine first emerged in the U.S. in the 2000s and was named an emerging public health threat in April 2023 after being linked to an increase in fatal overdoses.

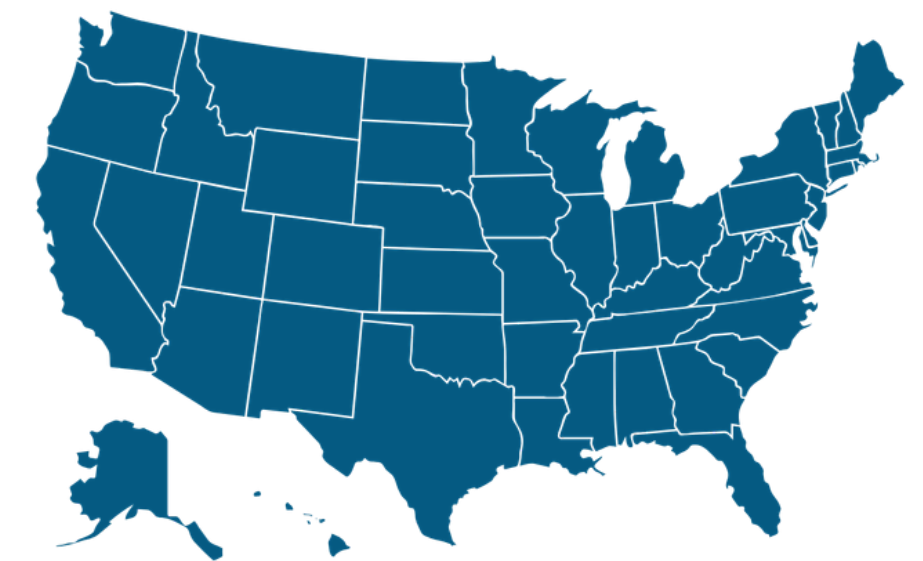
Number of Xylazine-Positive Overdose Deaths by Region

Region	2020	2021	% Increase
Northeast	631	1,281	103%
South	116	1,423	1,127%
Midwest	57	351	516%
West	4	34	750%

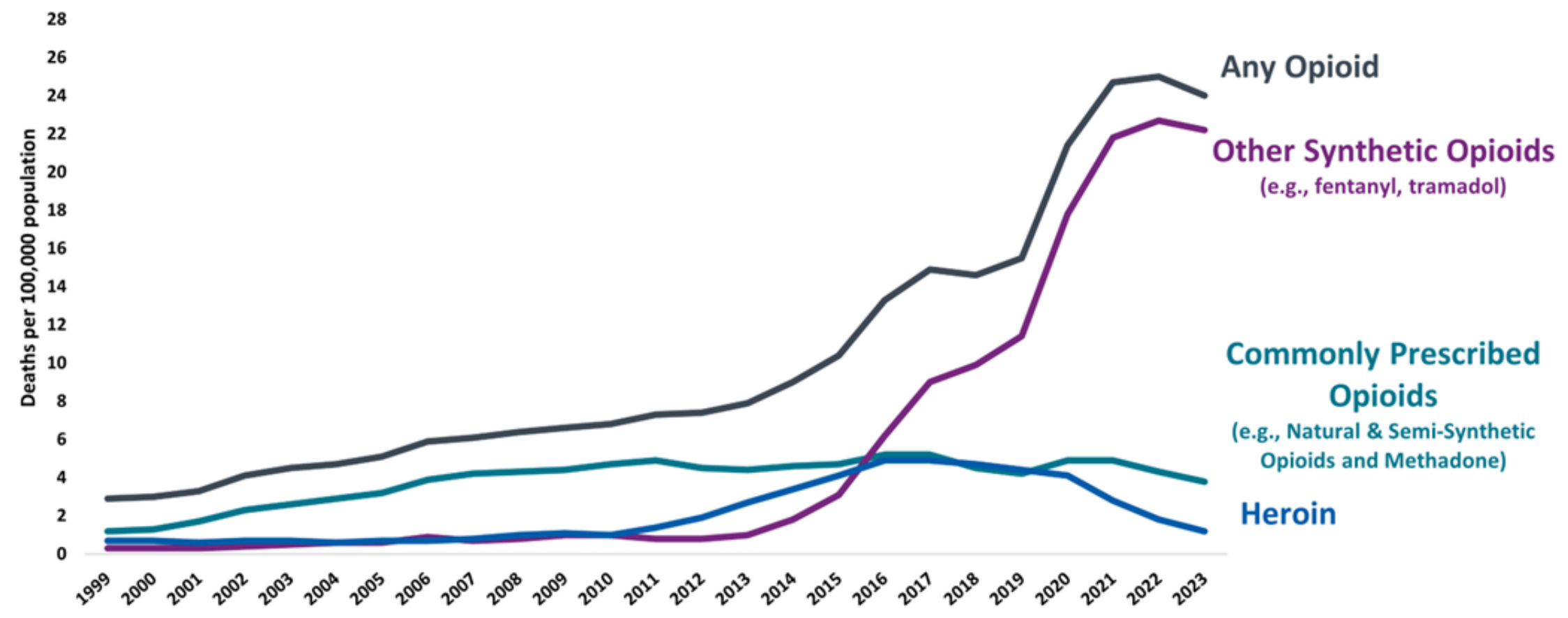
Source: DEA

13+
Erie County, NY

Opioid overdose deaths in 2023 involved xylazine



Three Waves of the Opioid Crisis



↑

Wave 1: Rise in Prescription Opioid Overdose Deaths Started in the 1990s

↑

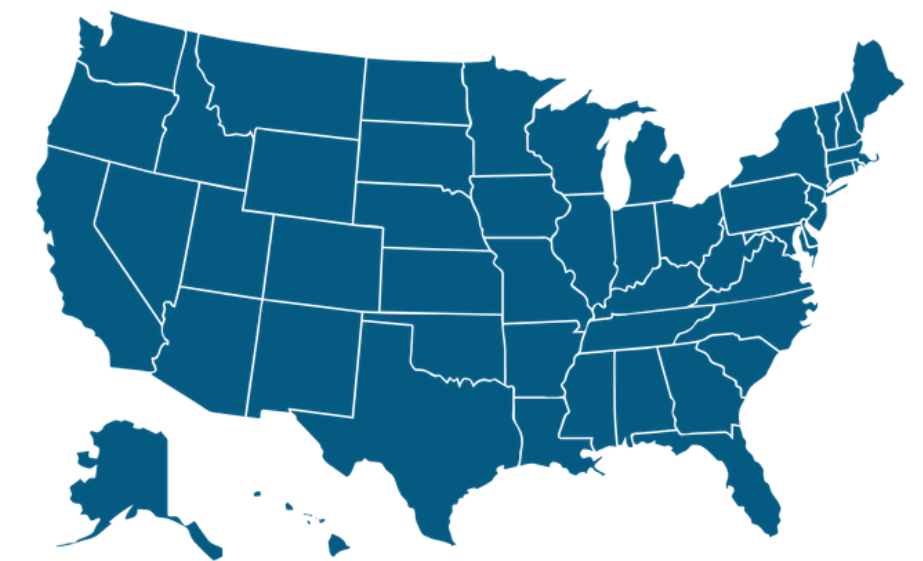
Wave 2: Rise in Heroin Overdose Deaths Started in 2010

↑

Wave 3: Rise in Synthetic Opioid Overdose Deaths Started in 2013

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality. CDC WONDER, Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2024. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/>.

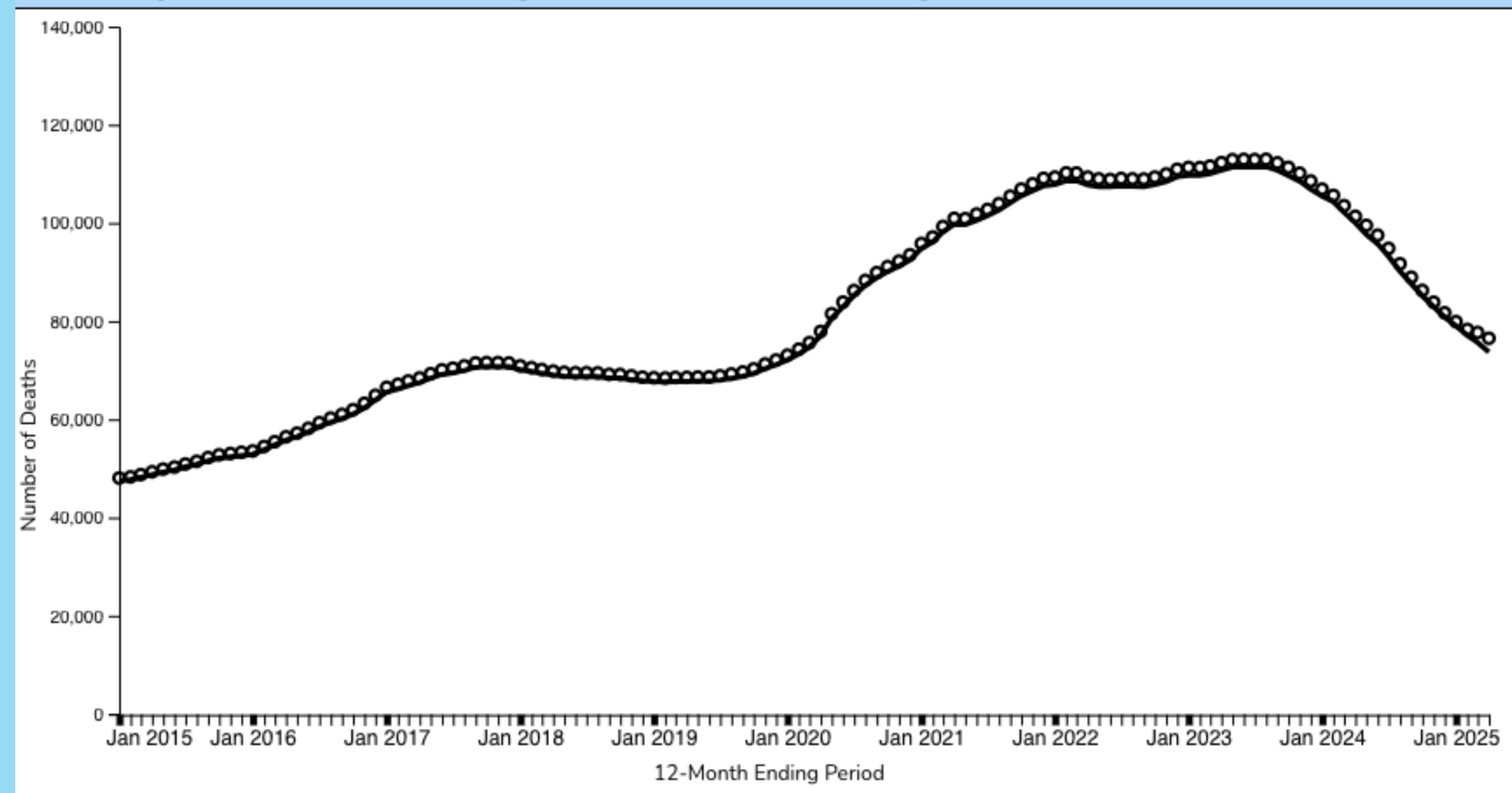




Opioid Overdose Deaths across the U.S.

Based on data available for analysis on: September 7, 2025

Figure 1a. 12 Month-ending Provisional Counts of Drug Overdose Deaths: United States



Select Jurisdiction

United States

○ Predicted Value

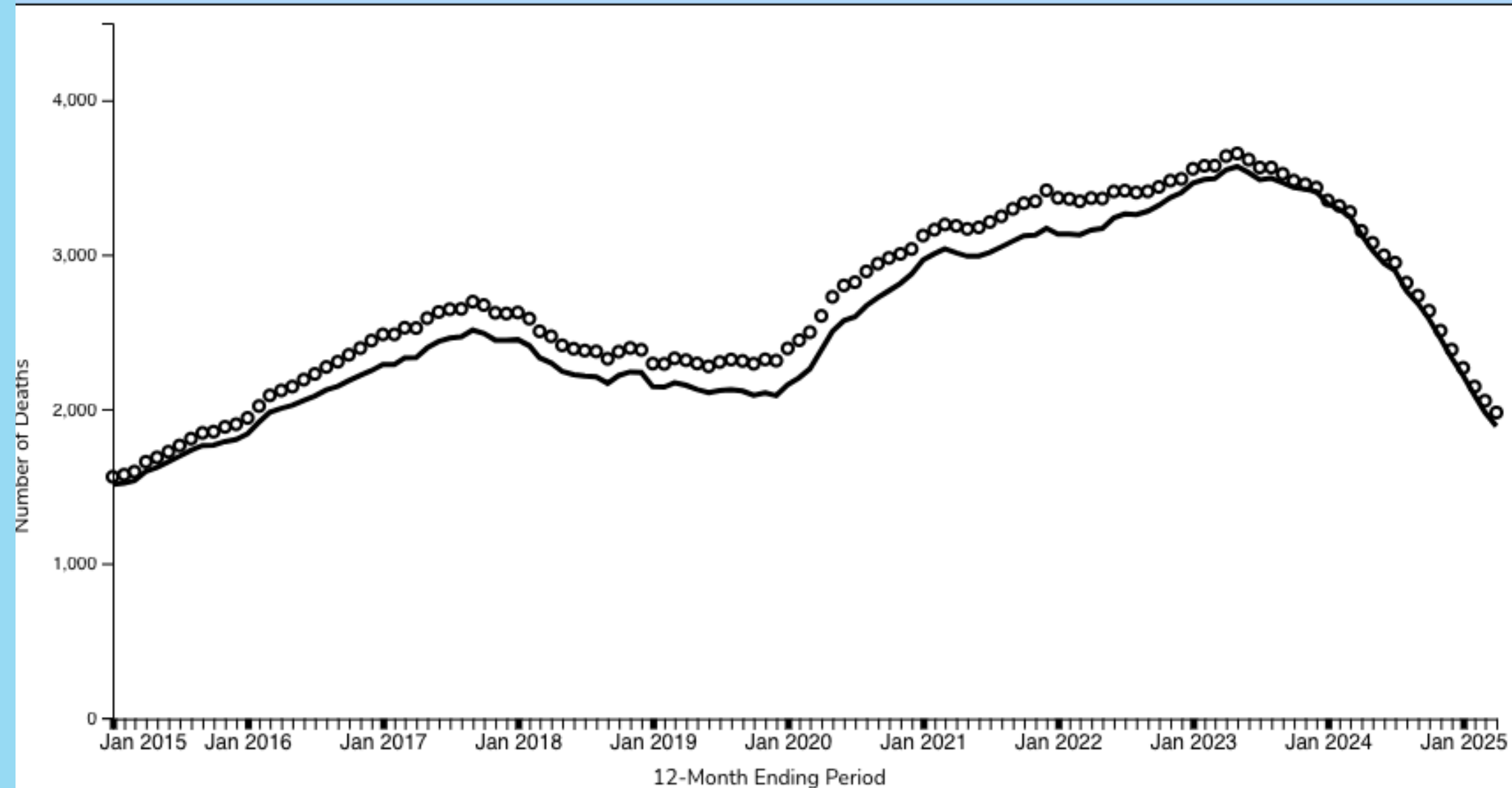
■ Reported Value

Opioid Overdose Deaths in NYS



Based on data available for analysis on: September 7, 2025

Figure 1a. 12 Month-ending Provisional Counts of Drug Overdose Deaths: New York



Select Jurisdiction

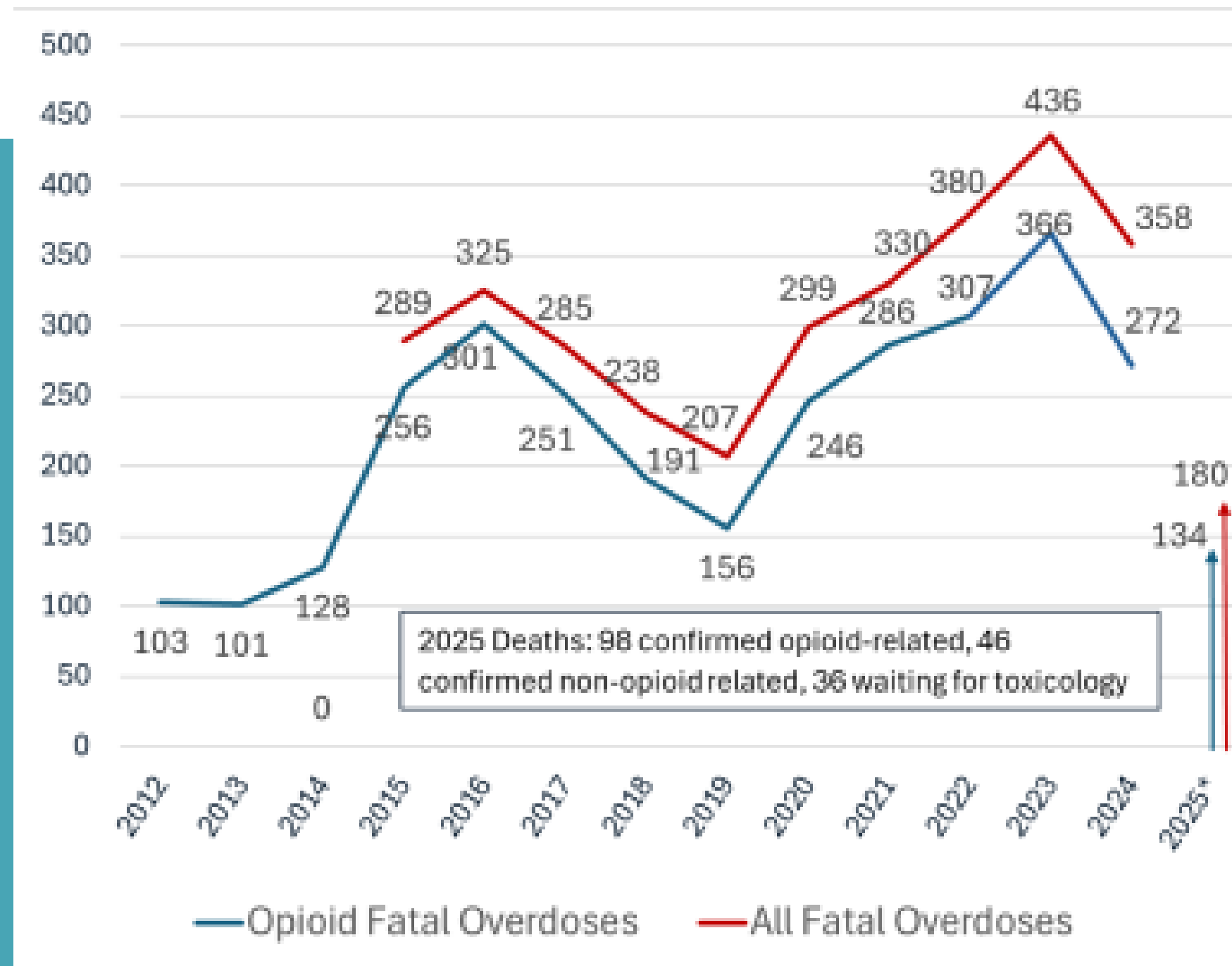
New York ▼

○ Predicted Value

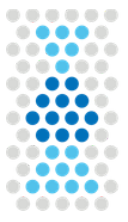
■ Reported Value



Opioid Overdose Deaths in Erie County



SOURCE: ERIE COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINERS OFFICE, *CASES REPORTED THRU 9/23/2025



Brain Storm!

What are some **signs** and **symptoms** of an overdose?



Signs & Symptoms of an Overdose



Blue lips or nails and
pinpoint pupils



Dizziness and confusion



Can't be woken up



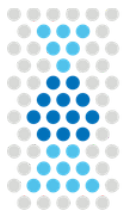
Choking, gurgling, or
snoring sounds



Slow, weak, or
no breathing



Drowsiness or difficulty
staying awake



Naloxone: What is it?



Opioid Overdose Reversal Medication

Naloxone is an *opioid agonist medication* that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. It is *safe to use on anyone*, regardless of age.

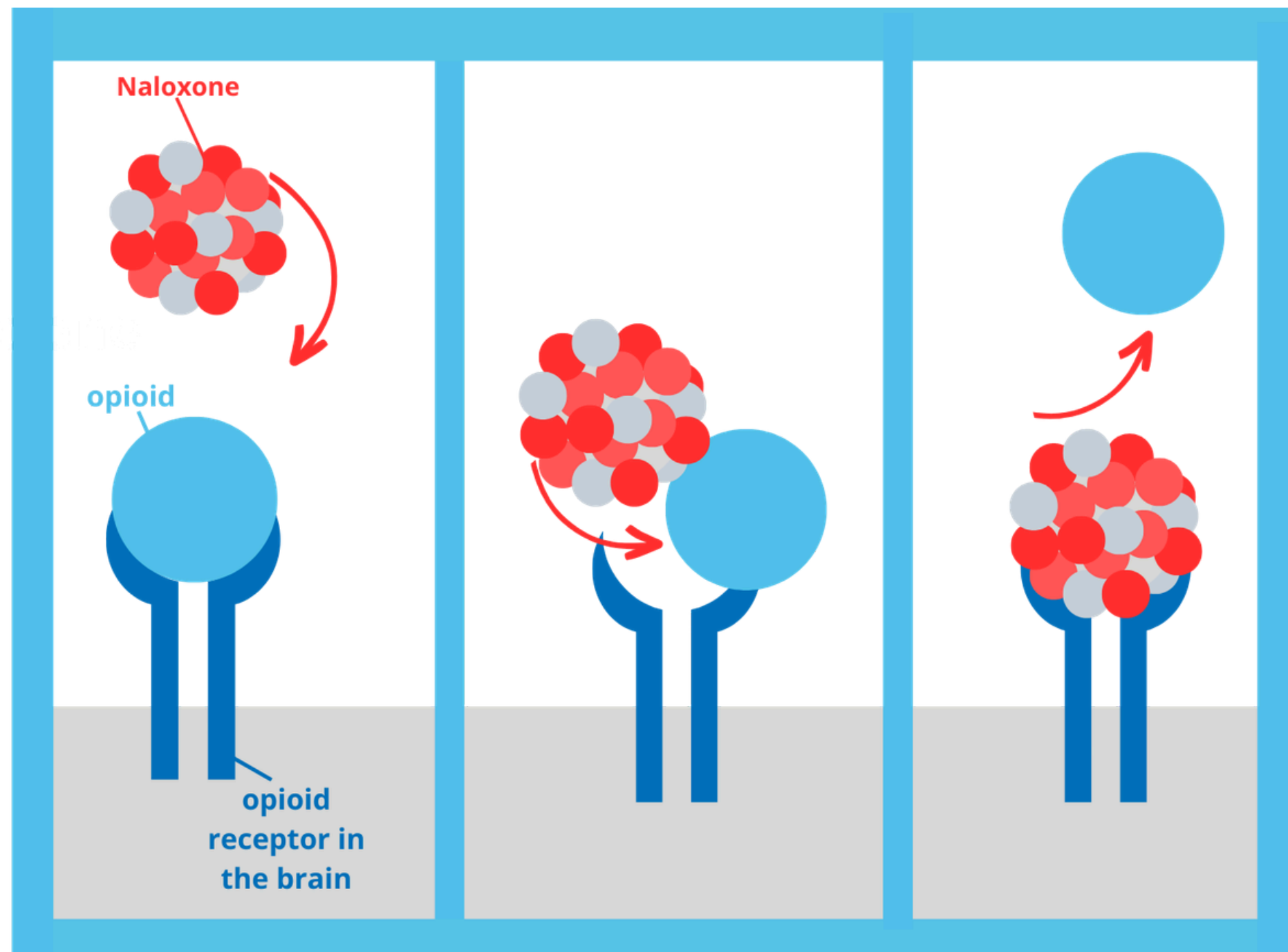


What if it's not an opioid overdose?

Naloxone only reverses the effects of an opioid overdose and has no effect on the body if no opioids are present.

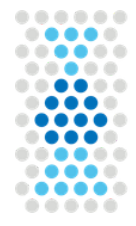


Naloxone: How does it work?



Opioid Antagonist

Naloxone knocks opioids off the receptors in the brain and then binds with the receptor to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.



Naloxone: Frequently Asked Questions



Q

Does naloxone expire?

Yes, the expiration date is on the box – but expired naloxone can still help!

At what age is naloxone safe?

People of all ages can safely use naloxone, including infants and older adults.

Q

Q

What if it isn't an opioid overdose?

Naloxone will not affect nor harm the body if there are no opioids present.

Can naloxone freeze?

Technically yes, but dethawed (and boiled) naloxone can still be effective.

Q

Pause & Think

If naloxone exists, why do opioid overdose deaths continue to happen in our communities?



Why Don't People Call 911?

People who use drugs (PWUD) often face blame, shame, and stigma – especially when engaging with law enforcement. There is also fear that calling 911 may lead to an arrest.



Good Samaritan Laws Protect You!

What are they?

49 out of 50 U.S. states have Good Samaritan Laws to encourage people to call 911 when they see or experience a drug/alcohol-related overdose without fear of prosecution. **Laws vary from state to state.**

Who is protected?

The individual calling 911 and the person who experienced an overdose are protected from drug and alcohol possession charges when seeking help during an overdose.

New York State Good Samaritan Law



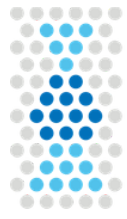
Does NOT protect you from:

- A1 felony possession of a controlled substance (8oz or more);
- Sale or intent to sell controlled substances;
- Open warrants for your arrest; and
- Violation of probation or parole

DOES protect you from:

- Possessing controlled substances up to and including A2 felony offenses (anything under 8oz);
- Possessing alcohol (underage);
- Possessing marijuana (any quantity);
- Possessing drug paraphernalia; and
- Sharing drugs





Steps to Take During an Overdose



Assess and
Call 911

1



Administer
Naloxone

2



Check for
Breathing

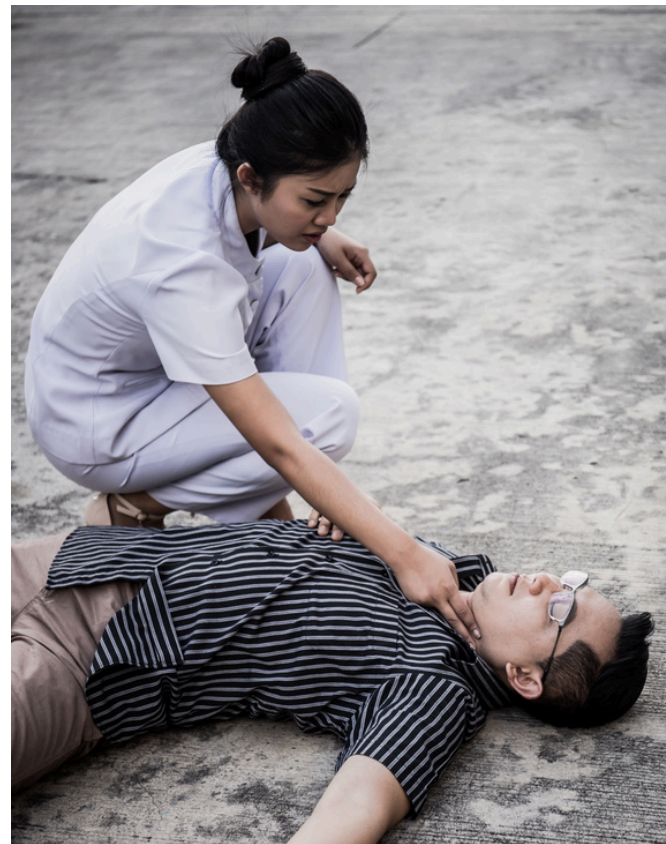
3



Stay and
Assist

4

Step 1: Assess and Call 911



Try to wake the individual

Yell their name or rub your knuckles against their sternum.

Check breathing

Check that their chest is rising and falling or listen closely for breathing sounds.

Call 911 immediately

If the individual is not responding, call 911 or instruct another bystander to call.

Step 2: Administer Naloxone



➔ **Peel**
Open the cartridge of naloxone by peeling back the plastic film.

➔ **Place**
Place the nozzle just inside the person's nostril with your thumb on the plunger.

➔ **Press**
Press the plunger to administer the medication into the nose.



Step 2: Continued



Wait **2-3 minutes** after administering naloxone for the medication to take effect



If there is no response, **give the second dose of naloxone** in the opposite nostril.



If you are trained and comfortable, **perform rescue breaths** in between doses.



Do Not Test

Each box only contains two doses of naloxone



Step 3: Rescue Breathing

Only Perform if Trained and Comfortable

● Check the Airway

Tilt the head back and lift the chin. Check the person's mouth to ensure there is nothing blocking the airway.

● Give Two Slow Breaths

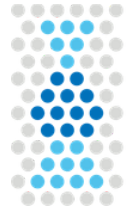
Place your mouth over the other person's mouth to make a seal and deliver two slow, breaths. **Make sure the chest is rising!**

● Pinch the Nose Closed

Before giving the first breath, make sure to pinch the nose so that all air goes into the lungs.

● One Breath / Five Seconds

Follow-up with one breath every five seconds until the individual can breathe on their own or until 911 arrives.



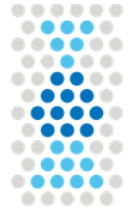
Step 4: Stay and Assist

Place the person in the recovery position and monitor them for withdrawal symptoms. Report what happened to 911 once they arrive.

What if the person wakes up?

Explain what happened, that you administered naloxone, and that the effects will wear off in about 90 minutes.





Recovery Position

Placing an individual in the recovery position helps ensure their safety. It prevents choking or aspiration and allows blood to circulate freely through the body.



Opioid Withdrawal Symptoms

After receiving naloxone, individuals with a built-up tolerance against opioids may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- **Anxiety**

Nervousness, restlessness, or irritability

- **General Malaise**

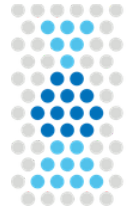
Aches, pain, dizziness, weakness, diarrhea

- **Flu-Like**

Sneezing, runny nose, fever, chills, goosebumps

- **Other**

Symptoms can vary by person and/or substance



Now What?



Resources & Support

Experiencing a non-fatal overdose puts someone at risk of experiencing a fatal overdose in the future.



Treatment and/or Harm Reduction Options

- National Harm Reduction Coalition
- NEXT Distro
- Shatterproof

The History of Harm Reduction



Harm Reduction Principles

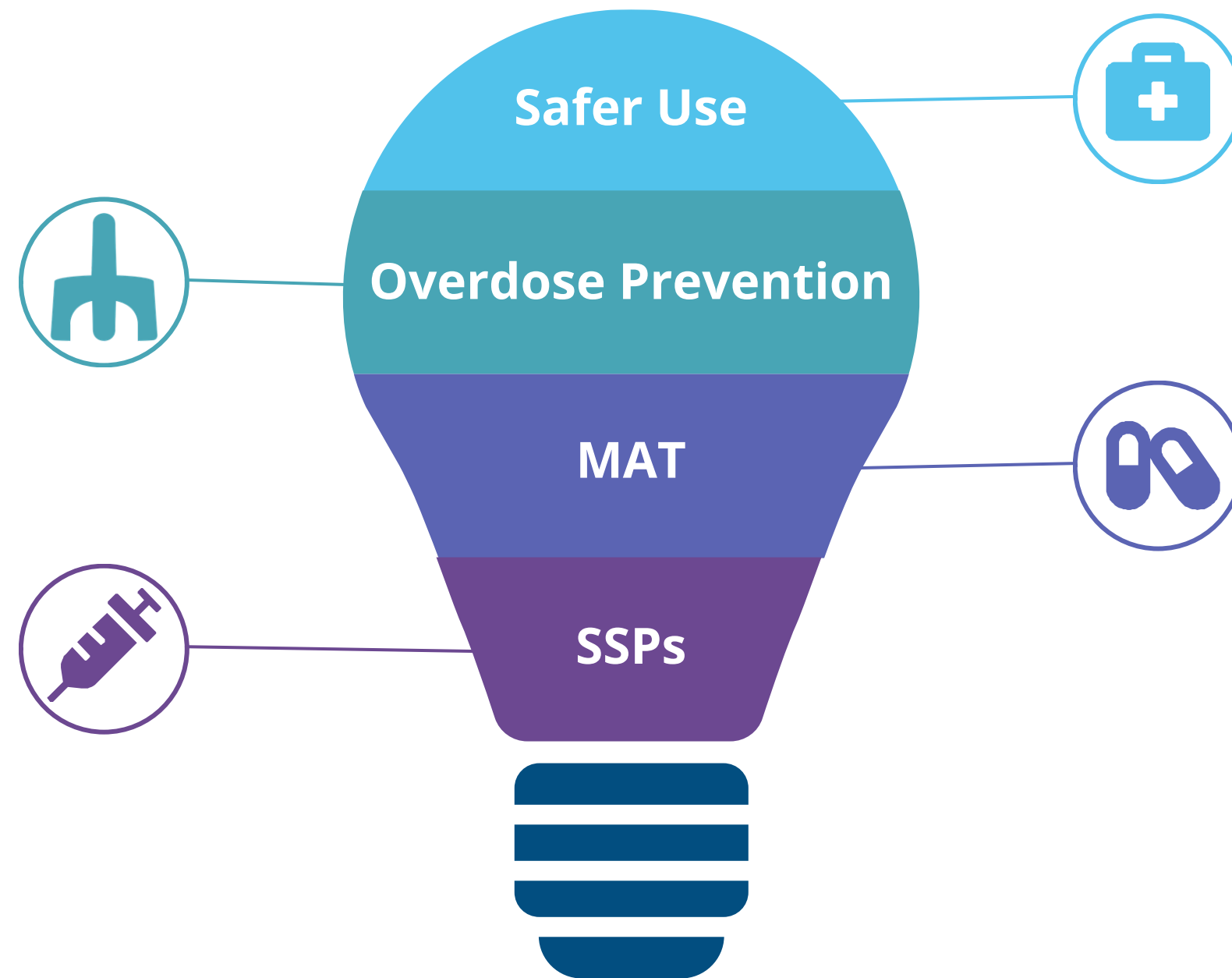
-  Participant Centered Services
-  Participant Involvement
-  Participant Autonomy
-  Pragmatism and Realism
-  Sociocultural Factors
-  Health and Dignity



Harm Reduction and Substance Use

Narcan training/access,
Good Samaritan Laws,
understanding the risks

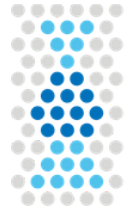
Sterile supplies, peer
support, referrals to
community services



Using less, using slower,
never using alone, testing
substances before use

Low threshold/improved access
to methadone, buprenorphine,
and naltrexone





Harm Reduction and The War on Drugs



Key Takeaways: The War on Drugs

Harm reduction emphasizes health, dignity, and equity, challenging the failures of punitive drug policies.

Question & Reflection

Did anything in the video challenge your assumptions or provide a new perspective on drug use and policy?

What can we do to push against stigma and support health-centered approaches?

Disproportionate Enforcement

Drug use has remained consistent across racial and class lines, but enforcement has always been unequal. Black and Latinx communities historically targeted.

Punishment ≠ Progress

Harsh policies led to mass incarceration rather than addressing root cause of substance use.

Example: Cannabis shifting into profit-driven industry while many criminalized communities are still excluded.

The Future of Harm Reduction

Safe Consumption Sites

Sites designed for people to use drugs under the supervision of trained personnel

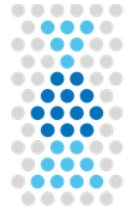
Safer Supply

Prescribing medications as a safer alternative to the illicit drug supply for people at high risk

Current Harm Reduction Strategies

- Fentanyl and xylazine test strips
- Naloxone trainings and distribution
- Community-based vending machines
- Mail-based syringe services





Naloxone Wall Boxes

Any organization can easily integrate harm reduction into their operations with emergency naloxone kits.

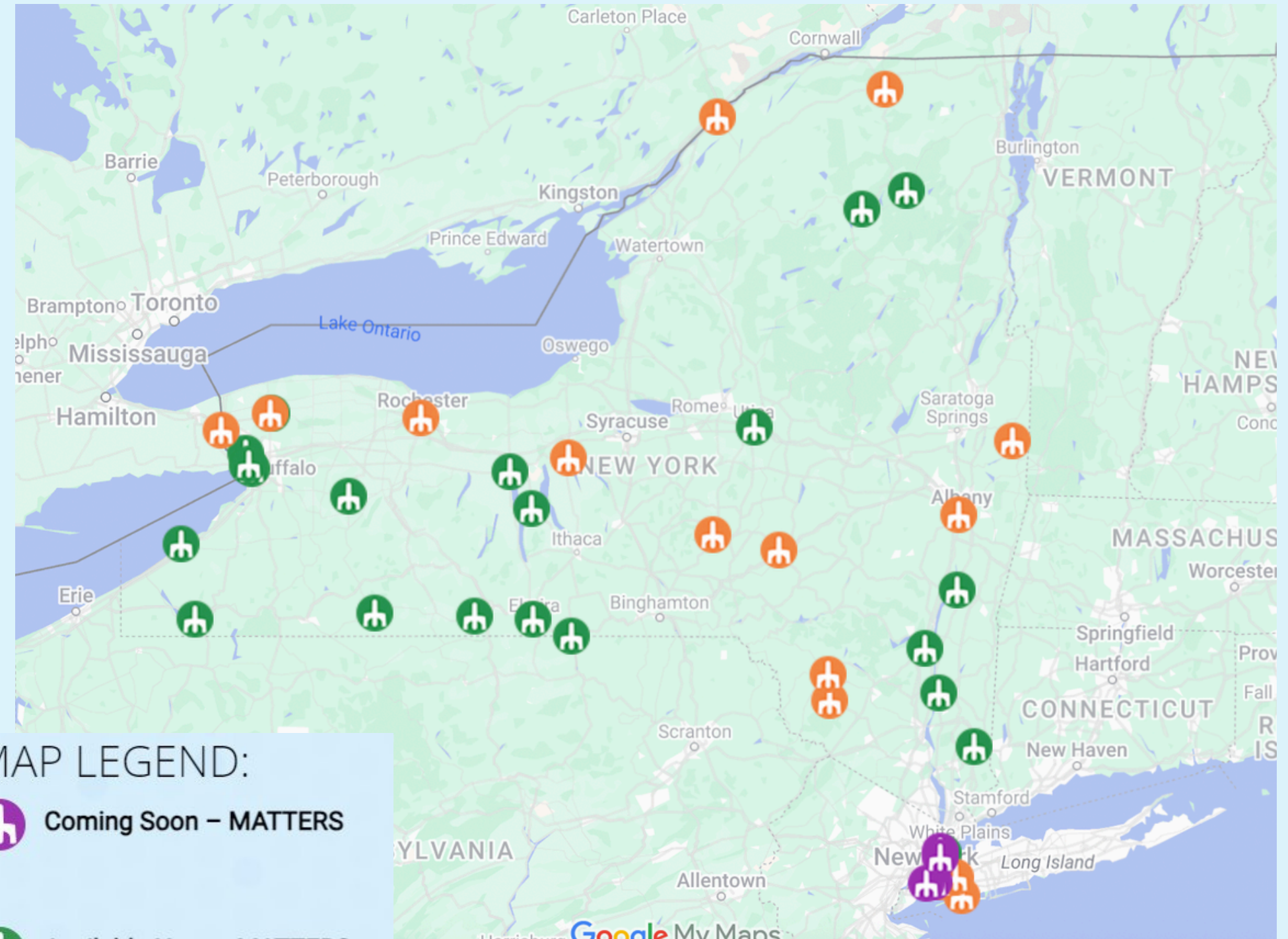
Free, Live-Saving Supplies

Select which box fits best for your organization's needs and submit an order online.



Harm Reduction Vending Machines

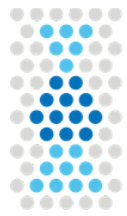
Machines are deployed at various locations around New York State, including treatment organizations, fire halls, and convenience stores. All supplies in the machines are free and available **24/7, 365 days a year**.



Community Advisory Committee

Nothing about us, without us, is
for us. Have your voice heard!





How Can YOU Reduce Stigma?

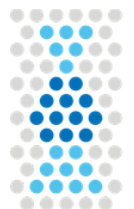
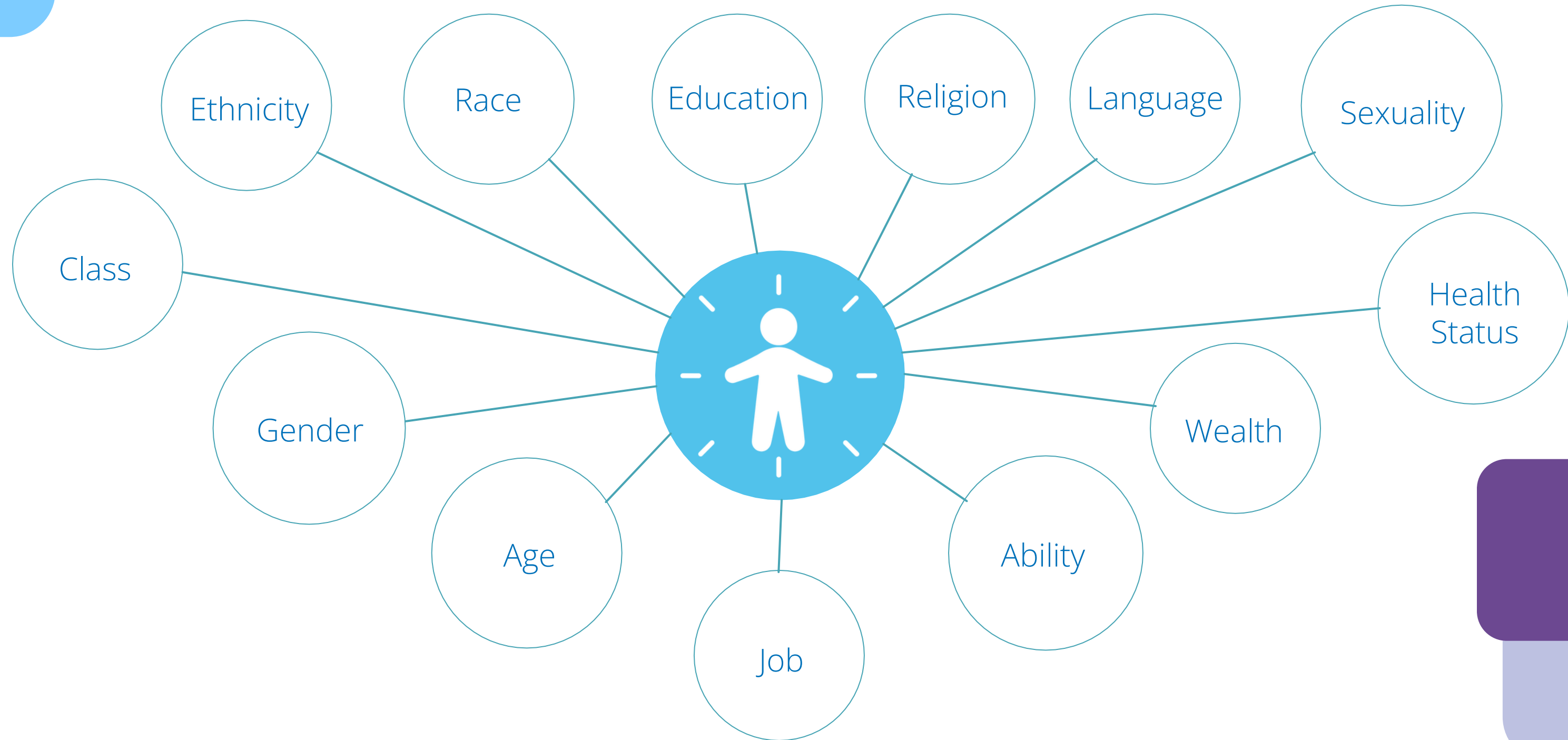
The **language we use** can be a powerful tool to reduce the stigma surrounding opioid and substance use disorders.

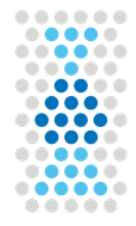


Person-First Language

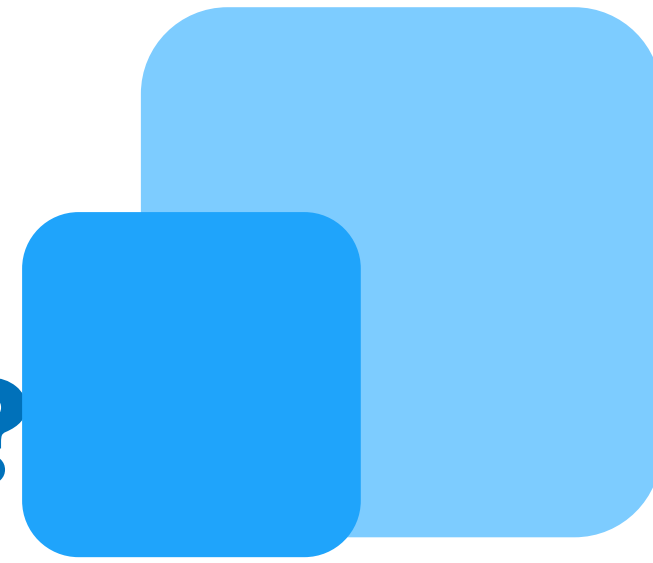
- **People are more than their drug use** – referring to someone as an ‘addict’ or ‘user’ implies someone is *something*, not *someone*.
- Using person-first language can make people feel more comfortable when accessing services.

Intersectionality and Harm Reduction





How Can YOU Reduce Stigma Around Substance Use?



Avoid fear-based language

Example: Use the term xylazine, not
“zombie drug”

Use technical language, not slang

Example: Use the term unconscious, not
“passed out”



Vet your sources

News sources sensationalize drug use –
verify your information

Avoid generalizing SUD

Not everyone who uses drugs has a
substance use disorder



Cost Effectiveness of Harm Reduction

An ounce of prevention is equal to a pound of treatment.



Syringe exchange programs reduce HIV transmission and improve access to other support services



Safe injection sites increase enrollment in detox and do not increase social disorder in the community



Housing First programs reduce healthcare spending & improve clinical outcomes for people with HIV/AIDS



You Can Be a Harm Reduction Hero

Learning about the principles of harm reduction is the first step!

Get trained on how to respond to an overdose, **use drug test strips**, and **learn more about community organizations** to help support people who use drugs.



Resources

- **Words Matter: Shatterproof**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QX17g6Xuk0>
- **Addiction Language Guide: Shatterproof**
<https://www.shatterproof.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/Stigma-AddictionLanguageGuide-v3.pdf>
- **National Harm Reduction Coalition**
<https://harmreduction.org/all-resources/>
- **National Public Radio:** [Why Words Matter](#)
- **VICE News:** [Inside a Free Safe Supply Clinic](#)
- **WBUR:** [How Changing Language Impacts Policy and Treatment](#)





Reach Out For More Information



Website

mattersnetwork.org



Telephone

765-MATTERS (628-8377)



Please Provide Feedback!

Let us know how we can improve our trainings.