



Together we can

Introduction

Each year, August 31 marks International Overdose Awareness Day, the world's largest annual campaign to end overdose. This year's theme, Together We Can, highlights the power of our community when we all stand together.

This toolkit offers practical resources to support state agencies, local health jurisdictions, and community organizations in sharing overdose prevention and education materials.

This year's toolkit includes:

- A letter to all behavioral health providers
- Overdose awareness and prevention resources
- Overdose awareness week social media materials
- Draft press release

Open letter to all behavioral health professionals

To our fellow Washingtonians and Tribal Nations,

On International August Overdose Awareness Day, we remember those who have lost their lives to overdose, and honor those who have tirelessly worked to prevent and respond to overdoses. We resolve to do all we can to save lives from a public health crisis that killed 3,432 people in Washington State in 2023. Four times as many people as died from car crashes.

Overdose deaths involving opioids and/or stimulants have reached unprecedented levels across our state and impact all Washingtonians and Tribal Nations. Communities of color and tribal communities have been disproportionately impacted by this crisis that has touched people of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic groups in both rural and urban areas throughout the state.

Recent increases in overdose deaths in Washington are being driven by illicit fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid. But most fatal drug overdoses in 2023 occurred among people who were using multiple substances.

The increased instability of the illicit drug supply is driven by the underlying structural and systemic roots of the overdose crisis, including poverty, racism, and housing insecurity. Lack of access to behavioral health services led many to self-treat their physical and emotional pain with illicit substances. Trauma from adverse childhood experiences as well as intergenerational and historical trauma driven by racism are powerful underlying forces that contribute to the development of substance use disorders.

To successfully treat substance use disorder, we must invest more effort and resources in evidence-based practices that can trigger positive change. To address the increasing rates of overdose in our state we must increase access to naloxone and address the underlying stigma associated with substance use. We call on all state agencies and

behavioral health service providers to enact change in the following areas:

1. **Prescribe or refer people to buprenorphine and methadone, and help people stay on or restart these medications:**

Buprenorphine and methadone are our most powerful tools to save lives from opioid use disorder. These treatments reduce the chance of dying from an overdose by 50%. Many people who use illicit opioids report wanting to reduce their use, and many want to start treatment utilizing medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). Yet there are major gaps in access to MOUD, such as:

- The lack of capacity of treatment agencies to bring on new patients.
- The lack of an Opioid Treatment Programs.
- The unwillingness of providers to serve people who actively use drugs in the existing care systems.

We need to lower the barriers to treatment, expand the number of health care providers offering treatment medications, and support people in their recovery during treatment. Healthcare providers need to treat people who use drugs with dignity, respect, and quality of care.

For the patient, getting started with an MOUD program can sometimes take multiple attempts. MOUD can offer stability for many patients, and providers should understand that every patient is different. Recovery will be easier for some than for others.

2. **Increase access to naloxone**

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. People who use drugs, their families, and their friends are the people most likely to witness and respond to an opioid overdose. Improving naloxone access for people who use drugs, and their loved ones saves lives. Naloxone can be obtained in WA through a variety of ways:

- **Purchase naloxone over the counter:** Nasal naloxone (including the brand name NARCAN®), can be purchased over the counter at retail pharmacies and retailers such as Target, Amazon, and Walmart.
- **Pharmacies.** Washington residents can use the [Washington State Standing Order to Dispense Naloxone](#) to get naloxone from the pharmacy using health insurance. Naloxone is free for people with Washington State Medicaid (Apple Health), and all insurance plans issued on or after 1/1/2020 must offer coverage without prior authorization.
- **Syringe Service Programs (SSPs).** SSPs provide support and services for people who use drugs, including free naloxone and overdose response training. You can find a directory of Washington SSPs [here](#).
- **Mail Order.** Some insurance companies offer mail-order pharmacy services that deliver naloxone to your home. For people who don't have insurance, the Washington [State Mail Order Naloxone program](#) mails free naloxone kits to community members who can't access naloxone from a store, pharmacy, or community program.

3. Refer patients and clients to harm reduction programs and programs to address social determinants of health

Many people living with opioid use disorder need multiple supports to improve their health and quality of life. We should expand community organizations and harm reduction services throughout the state that serve people who use drugs at high risk for overdose. These are spaces where people can receive non-judgmental support and services.

4. Community Education and Stigma Reduction

Behavioral health providers should work to educate the community and their patients and clients about

the risks associated with opioid use disorder and give people evidence-based information on ways they can make positive change. Children and their parents should be provided with non-stigmatizing information regarding the risks of using drugs sold on the street and online. There is a need to increase public awareness that medications for opioid use disorder are by far the most effective treatments, and that naloxone can save lives from opioid overdose. And even though around 50% of Americans know someone with substance use disorder, shame and stigma force individuals and families affected by substance use into the shadows, making it harder for them to get the help they need.

On International Overdose Awareness Day, we express our deep gratitude for anyone who has reversed an overdose or who carries naloxone. To our fellow Washingtonians who have been on the front lines of the overdose crisis (those of you in social services, health care, education, and first responders): You have saved countless lives while working in extremely difficult circumstances, often thanklessly and without the resources you need. We appreciate all you are doing and have done.

For those of you not yet prescribing buprenorphine medication for opioid use disorder, we ask that you please do so. You can be the catalyst for positive change. And to all people who are experiencing problems related to their substance use, caught in the grip of opioids and other drugs, you are our friends and loved ones who deserve our compassion and our commitment to supporting you to live a happy, healthy life.

Together we can:

- Save a life
- #EndOverdose

Resources to prevent an overdose

For crisis services

- Visit the [988 website](#) or call or text 988 for free or confidential support for people in crisis 24/7.
- The [National Helpline](#) can assist with referrals and information 24/7 at 1-800-662-HELP (4357).
- If you are facing a disaster the [National Disaster Line](#) can provide immediate crisis counseling related to disasters at 1-800-985-5990.

Preventing overdose

- Learn [how to get and use naloxone](#) (Narcan).
- [Never use alone.](#)
- [Safe Spot](#)
- Learn about the [For our Lives](#) campaign.
- Learn about the [Friends for Life](#) campaign.

For treatment resources

- The Washington Recovery Help Line is an anonymous and confidential help line that provides crisis intervention and referral services for Washington State residents. Professionally trained volunteers and staff are available to provide emotional support 24 hours a day, and offer local treatment resources for substance abuse, problem gambling and mental health as well as to other community services.
- FindTreatment.gov is a confidential and anonymous resource for persons seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders in the United States and its territories.
 - Learn about [how to find quality treatment](#), the different types of treatment, and what to expect when starting treatment.
 - Learn [how to pay for treatment](#) whether you have insurance or not.
 - Understanding [Substance Use Disorder](#).
 - Understanding [Mental Health Disorders](#).

For medication for opioid use disorder resources

- [Find practitioners and treatment programs](#) providing buprenorphine for opioid use disorder.
- [Find programs that provide methadone](#) for the treatment of opioid use disorder.

For housing or emergency services

- 211 provides information including but not limited to housing, transportation, and food resources. [Visit the 211 website](#) or call 211 24/7.

Social media for overdose awareness

Today is National Overdose Awareness Day. Honor the memory of people who have lost their lives to overdose by taking one simple action: Start carrying naloxone. Naloxone reverses the effects of an opioid overdose and saves lives. While people's reasons for carrying naloxone differ, it always comes down to this: carrying naloxone is an act of love — for your friends, your neighbors, your community.

Find out where you can get naloxone near you and start carrying it today: wafriendsforlife.com/get-naloxone



August 31 is International Overdose Awareness Day, a day to remember without stigma those we've lost and acknowledge the grief of the family and friends left behind. #OverdoseAwarenessDay

Knowing the signs of an overdose can save a life.

- Slow or no breathing
- Won't wake up
- Pale, ashy, cool skin
- Blue lips or fingernails

Many who overdose on fentanyl did not know that they were taking it. Check for these symptoms and if you detect any signs of an overdose, call 911 immediately. #Nationaloverdoseawarenessday



It may be hard to tell whether a person is experiencing an overdose. If you aren't sure, treat it like an overdose—you could #SaveALife

Overdose does not discriminate. Opioids have serious risks of misuse and overdose. This International Overdose Awareness Day, find resources related to opioid overdose and learn what SAMHSA is doing to help reduce these risks to #EndOverdose.

If you, a friend, or a loved one has an opioid use disorder (OUD) talk with a health care provider to learn how medications can help ([samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders](https://www.samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders)). For many people living with OUD, medication can make life's activities more doable.



On #IOAD, we remember those who lost their lives to overdose & mourn with their loved ones. We deepen our commitment to preventing these tragic deaths, advancing service & support systems for those with substance use disorders & their families.



Sample press release

For immediate release

The [State Agency Name] announces the observance of Overdose Awareness Day on Saturday, August 31. On this day we highlight the critical issue of drug overdoses, honor the 3,432 people in our state who have lost their lives to substance use and promote initiatives to prevent future tragedies.

Overdose Awareness Day serves as a vital tool for raising public awareness about the impact of overdose on individuals, families, and communities. In recent years, our state has seen a significant increase in overdose cases, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address this crisis. Our state continues to work on **advancing efforts in prevention, education, and support** to combat the ongoing epidemic.

“Agency leaders encourage all community members to participate in Overdose Awareness Day, whether by attending events, sharing information, or simply taking a moment to reflect on the impact of this issue. Together, we can build a stronger, more resilient community and work towards a future free from the devastating effects of overdose.” [said agency leader]

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For more information about Overdose Awareness Day [visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) webpage](#).