

The Vermont Department of Health, Divisions of Substance Use Program (DSU), Emergency Preparedness and Response and Injury Prevention (DEPRIP), and Laboratory Sciences and Infectious Disease (LSID) have strengthened their partnership to address the increasing number of opioid overdoses. These divisions meet regularly to discuss and address challenges and gaps in services, to identify solutions and to support our community organizations in rapid response and long-term planning.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Improving access and reducing barriers to services**
- **Multifaceted and comprehensive approach**
- **Meeting people where they are**

What initiatives are addressing opioid overdoses?

1. Community Support for Overdose Prevention

Overdose Outreach is a new initiative between the Health Department and Vermont's four syringe service programs (SSPs). Through this initiative the SSPs developed a program to actively reach people who are not connected to services to provide harm reduction education and tools, and information on treatment and recovery services. The intention is to build trust and awareness of SSP services and engage people in ongoing harm reduction strategies. During the initial phase, over 4,500 people were served, nearly a third of whom indicated they had never interacted with harm reduction services. This initiative entered its second phase in October 2024 and will continue to focus on connecting with those not currently engaged in harm reduction, treatment or recovery services.

Mobile syringe service exchanges are available through all of Vermont's Syringe Services Programs (SSPs): Vermont CARES, AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, the HIV/HCV Resource Center (H2RC), and Howard Center Safe Recovery. These mobile exchanges help to meet the needs of Vermonters who are unable to access services through a fixed site location. The mobile exchanges provide sterile injection equipment, HIV/HCV tests, case management and naloxone to people either at their homes or in a public location (such as a parking lot) that is easily accessible. This modality of service compliments the SSP services provided at physical locations throughout the state.

Community drug-checking became legal in Vermont in 2023, with [Vermont's Community Drug-Checking Guidelines](#) being published in early 2024. Grants were provided to Vermont's four Syringe Services Programs (SSPs) to purchase drug-checking machines. Implementation of this programming began late 2024. The drug-checking machines provide comprehensive results of what is in samples of substances being checked to help inform participants' overdose prevention strategies. As drug-checking results are submitted, the Health Department will make the results publicly available to help inform a broader audience to support overdose prevention efforts. This level of information is important with Vermont's changing drug supply.

Safety planning for clients is a priority for SSPs, treatment providers, and recovery center staff to reduce the risk of overdose or returning to use. This work was enhanced in response to COVID-19 and continues post-pandemic.

Outreach by Recovery Centers is happening through Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) funding in three counties with a high burden of opioid overdoses. The focus of these grants is to identify and provide resources and referrals to those most impacted by opioid overdoses.

Community-level Rapid Overdose Response has been developed as an alert systems to identify when there is a significant increase in overdose calls to EMS and visits to emergency departments related to overdoses. A team from multiple divisions throughout the Health Department will review increases and identify community partners to allow for a rapid response utilizing local resources.

2. Naloxone Distribution

Vermont EMS is required to offer naloxone to any person who overdosed on opioids and have refused transportation to the hospital for additional care. Beginning in 2020, this protocol also requires naloxone leave behind kits to be provided to people who may exhibit other signs of opioid misuse when EMS (emergency medical services) arrives on scene for a non-overdose emergency. The naloxone leave behind kits may also be given to a bystander or family member who may be able to save a life.

Community Based Distribution of Narcan® Kits is intended to ensure those who may have the opportunity to intervene with an opioid overdose have Narcan® available to do so. This means any individual who believes they could help someone at risk of an opioid overdose, or who are at risk of an opioid overdose themselves are eligible. It should be noted that fentanyl is being found in many illicit substances, not just heroin. Those using substances not purchased at a pharmacy are encouraged to receive Narcan® and teach loved ones where it is kept and how to use it in case of an unintentional overdose.

Harm Reduction Packs include naloxone, fentanyl test strips, rescue breathing mouth barriers and educational information. Packs are distributed through multiple locations including the General Assistance hotels. Additional distribution locations include probation and parole, SSPs, recovery centers and shelters. Fentanyl test strips will continue beyond the pilot period designated by the legislature. This initiative was enhanced in response to COVID-19.

Mailed Narcan® became available through the Health Department in October 2023. Within the first 12 months of being available, over 1,000 orders were received and processed. This option has continued to help make Narcan® as accessible as possible for all Vermonters. To order Narcan® to be mailed to your home visit: HealthVermont.gov/Naloxone

Public Health Vending Machines (PHVMs) are supported by the Health Department as an effective way to make Narcan®, drug test strips, and other overdose prevention materials more accessible to Vermonters. The Health Department has agreements with two organizations to implement PHVMs in two counties in Vermont. PHVMs allow for materials that need to be temperature controlled, such as Narcan®, to be available outside of buildings. This increases the availability of Narcan® for people who may not want to interact with someone to receive Narcan® or for those who are unable to be at a location during their business hours. It is anticipated that these will be open in 2025.

Helping Vermont
communities respond
to opioid overdoses.

3. Overdose Messaging

KnowOD is an opioid overdose prevention campaign reaching two primary audiences: people at risk of an overdose, and their family and friends. Key messaging for people at risk of an overdose focuses on six overdose prevention and harm reduction tips:

1. Never use alone—if you OD while alone, you can die
2. Go slow—start with a small amount to test drug strength
3. Call 911—in case of an overdose
4. Use new syringes—to reduce risk of infections and help to protect vein health.
5. Test for fentanyl—fentanyl can be dangerous, so test with easy-to-use strips
6. Carry naloxone—Narcan® nasal spray can reverse an overdose

The campaign also highlights steps family and friends can take to lower a loved one's risk of a fatal overdose, including where to find free naloxone, keeping naloxone on-hand (and knowing how to use it) and calling 911. New messaging also increases awareness that fentanyl can be found in opioids and other drugs like cocaine, methamphetamine and any other powder and pills. The campaign directs people to call or visit [VT Helplink](#) or visit [KnowODVT.com](#) for more information and resources.

A separate digital campaign reaches young adults with messaging addressing the increased risks of using alcohol and prescription opioids together, side effects of misusing opioids, the risks of sharing prescriptions, fentanyl awareness and signs of an overdose,

4. Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)

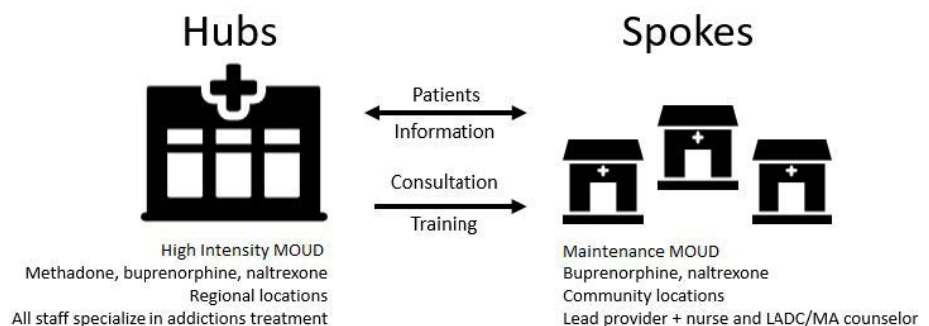
Hub and Spoke System

utilizes a system of nine regional Hubs and over 100 Spokes, including Vermont's six correctional facilities, to provide MOUD for Vermonters. Hubs provide a higher intensity of support to their clients and work closely with their

region's spoke providers which are office-based treatment locations, often embedded within primary care and family medicine offices. Patients who need a higher level of support in their treatment and recovery experience are treated by Hubs, while those who might have more stability in their treatment and recovery are treated by Spokes. Patients who are prescribed buprenorphine or naltrexone can be moved between Hubs and Spokes depending on their support needs.

Between 2016 and 2020, most Vermonters who died of a drug overdose did not have evidence that they had ever been treated for substance use disorder¹. MOUD is an important strategy in Vermont's overdose prevention efforts. This evidence-based treatment modality is overseen in partnership by the Vermont Blueprint for Health and DSU. For more information on the Hub and Spoke system of MOUD visit [Hub and Spoke | Blueprint for Health](#).

For those looking to engage in treatment services visit [VTHelplink.org](#).



5. Overdose Prevention Center

Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs) became legal in Vermont in June 2024 through Act 178. The Health Department released the [Vermont Overdose Prevention Center Operating Guidelines](#) in September 2024 following extensive outreach with key organizations who work closely with those most impacted by overdose, and entities from New York City and Rhode Island where OPCs currently exist. The Health Department will provide the City of Burlington with funding for a four-year pilot of an OPC.

6. Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee

The Commissioner of Health chairs Vermont's Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee which provides recommendations to Vermont's legislature on how the state's share of settlement money with drug manufacturers and distribution companies over the toll caused by prescription opioids should be allocated. This advisory committee was developed through [Act 118](#) and provided its first [set of recommendations](#) to the legislature in March 2023. For more information and to see meeting dates, agendas, minutes and materials, visit [HealthVermont.gov/OSAC](https://healthvermont.gov/OSAC).

For more information, contact AHS.VDHDSU@vermont.gov.

ⁱ <https://healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/ADAP-treatment-for%20SUD-2016-2020.pdf>