



# Together in Recovery:

## Priorities for Action

June 2020

In April 2019, RIZE Massachusetts Foundation (RIZE) launched the *Together in Recovery: Supporting Informed Decisions* (TiR) initiative. TiR aims to foster an accessible, integrated treatment and recovery network in Massachusetts that champions evidence-based approaches, supports multiple pathways to recovery, and puts people in charge of their treatment choices. In collaboration with C4 Innovations (C4), this initiative provided an opportunity for the exchange of diverse viewpoints and experiences to deepen awareness of the full range of treatment and recovery options for opioid use disorder (OUD) and builds momentum toward a shared vision to make these options available to all. TiR was guided by a Change Team of 44 diverse influencers spanning peer, clinical, policy, family, and community roles. The Change Team met eight times between June 2019 and February 2020 to build a vision for driving future collective action across the recovery and treatment network in Massachusetts.

Over 12 months, TiR convened stakeholders to begin to develop trust, facilitate learning and information exchange, define common ground and shared values, build collective commitments, and identify shared priorities and items for action. Through these activities, TiR formed a strong foundation that represented diverse roles, functions, perspectives, and communities across the Commonwealth. Through a carefully crafted and facilitated dialogue process, TiR engaged key stakeholders in one-on-one conversations, regional meetings, and a statewide event to deepen understanding of evidence-based approaches and person-centered strategies. The recommended priorities in the blueprint for action are a result of this process. They promote an overall framework for achieving an accessible, integrated treatment and recovery network, provide varied perspectives of treatment and recovery, and offer specific steps for implementation.

### About RIZE Massachusetts Foundation

RIZE, a statewide nonprofit, is committed to achieving zero stigma and zero deaths related to OUD by investing in meaningful solutions and engaging broad perspectives that will save lives, reduce harm, and end the opioid epidemic in Massachusetts. Learn more at [rizema.org](http://rizema.org).

### About C4 Innovations

C4 Innovations advances recovery, wellness, and housing stability for people who are marginalized. C4 is committed to reducing disparities and achieving equitable outcomes. They partner with service organizations, communities, and systems to develop and implement research-based solutions that are person-centered, recovery-oriented, and trauma-informed. Learn more at [c4innovates.com](http://c4innovates.com).

RIZE and C4 share a commitment to foster an accessible treatment network that meets people where they are in their personal journey toward recovery, supports informed and shared decision-making, and coordinates treatment and services to support long-term recovery from OUD.



## Importance of Process

Despite the urgency of the opioid overdose crisis, long-standing divisions endure about how best to support people with OUD—translating into missed opportunities to engage, treat, support people, and save lives. These divisions reflect a variety of philosophical, practical, and systems challenges across the care continuum, many of which were cultivated over decades and driven by personal and professional knowledge, experiences, and biases.

Transforming entrenched ways of thinking and working begins with stakeholders who represent the full range of perspectives convening in an environment of trust and respect. By creating and sustaining a dedicated space that is safe, authentic, and productive for shared learning and leadership, stakeholders can begin to find common ground, learn from one another, and develop trust. TiR has adopted the philosophy that the work of transformation requires investing in the change *process* itself to achieve the envisioned *action* and *outcomes*.

# Input from Across Massachusetts

## Regional Meetings

Over a five-week period in October and November 2019, TiR hosted nine regional stakeholder dialogue meetings across Massachusetts. Meetings were held in Amherst, Andover, Boston, Brockton, Easthampton, Framingham, Lenox, Worcester, and Yarmouth. A total of 322 people attended, representing a variety of systems, services, and roles affected by the opioid crisis, including:

- health care and treatment providers;
- health insurance companies;
- state and local government agencies;
- peer and other recovery support services;
- people in recovery and family members;
- housing and homeless services;
- prevention programs;
- the criminal justice system;
- education;
- employers and unions;
- community coalitions and stakeholders; and
- public safety and first responders.



The meetings provided an opportunity for participants to learn about different treatment options and pathways to recovery and resulted in robust, spirited, and passionate discussion. Each meeting began with a panel of people in recovery from substance use disorder sharing their unique journeys. Each meeting also included facilitated small group discussions, where participants shared reflections on barriers to offering all pathways to treatment and recovery, information needed to support all pathways, and opportunities for improving the treatment and recovery network. The meetings helped the Change Team understand what is needed to expand access to treatment and recovery options.

## Statewide Convening

Following the regional meetings, TiR hosted a statewide convening on November 19, 2019. All participants from the regional stakeholder dialogue meetings were invited. A total of 99 stakeholders assembled, representing a wide range of regional meeting attendees.

The statewide meeting began with a panel of people in recovery from substance use disorder telling their stories. RIZE and C4 staff presented themes heard during the regional meetings, and participants joined small groups focused on topics related to those themes:

- Gaps in the continuum of care
- Anti-stigma and education efforts
- Collaborations and linkages among systems, programs, and providers

- The criminal justice system
- A collective impact agenda
- Leadership by people in recovery
- Multilingual and culturally responsive services
- Person-centered, recovery-oriented care
- Services and programs that work
- Training and education for providers and other key stakeholders

The meeting helped TiR determine what is needed to expand access to treatment and recovery options and what actions to take during future phases of the initiative.

## What We Heard

Participants in the regional and statewide meetings represented a diverse mix of people working to end the opioid epidemic in Massachusetts. The discussions, networking, and relationship-building opportunities were rich and led to significant learning.

We heard that having access to a variety of services and supports is critical. These service should include

- detox and treatment programs;
- medication for opioid use disorder;
- harm reduction, 12-step, and SMART recovery programs;
- abstinence supports;
- peer support and recovery coaches;
- halfway houses and sober homes;
- therapy, primary care, counseling, and therapeutic communities; and
- supportive services for people in jails and prisons.



We consistently heard that being able to choose from multiple options to create unique recovery pathways makes all the difference. Some services and supports may work at one stage of recovery but not at another, what doesn't work now may work in the future, and an individual's preferences and needs must inform treatment and support options for the greatest chance of success.

In addition, the way in which services are delivered is significant. We heard that services work best when providers understand what recovery is, believe recovery is possible, work to build trust, are compassionate and caring, and meet people where they are. Services also work best when delivered in ways that are safe, supportive, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, gender-specific, and person-centered.

Many people in recovery and the family members of those in recovery shared that they have relied on various treatment and recovery supports along their journeys, including

- housing;
- intentional recovery communities;
- in-patient and out-patient treatment programs;
- family and other supportive networks;
- exercise and yoga;
- faith and spirituality;
- access to transportation;
- education;
- employment;
- hobbies; and
- volunteering.

People in recovery also shared that their journeys involved the need for patience and persistence, flexible thinking, goal setting and structure, resiliency skills, overcoming fear, and employing strategies to reduce or eliminate internalized stigma.

An important theme at all the meetings was the need for a cultural shift toward person-centered, recovery-oriented care and provision of multilingual, culturally responsive services that elevate the voices of people with lived experience and address racial equity. Along with that came many ideas for strengthening the recovery community for people in or seeking recovery and their families.

We also heard about barriers, including challenges to the access and availability of services, lack of funding, and the limitations of existing funding sources. People articulated significant challenges with widespread stigma and discrimination against those with substance use disorder. This bias often stems from lack of knowledge among providers and the general public about substance use, recovery, and multiple pathways to recovery. There are barriers presented by the design of the service system (e.g., siloed services and systems), privacy rules, and workforce challenges. There are also barriers unique to the criminal justice system and reentry processes.

Existing gaps in information impact people seeking recovery. There is a lack of information about what works, what is available, and where services and support are located. Stakeholders also expressed a need for more education and information about substance use disorder, recovery, and various treatment and recovery pathways. They also sought a better understanding of how services are utilized and paid for, where gaps exist, and who doesn't have service access.

We heard a great deal about opportunities that could facilitate the creation of an accessible, integrated care continuum. Many people talked about the need for better data-sharing across agencies, systems, and regions. Participants consistently wished for more opportunities to collaborate and build greater awareness of other roles, programs, and services in the system within their region and throughout Massachusetts.



## Identifying Priorities

The TiR team synthesized and categorized information gleaned from the regional and statewide meetings into seven recommended areas for action:

- Address stigma
- Build awareness of each agency's role and expand collaborations
- Enhance workforce development, provider education, and support
- Inform state policies and educate policymakers
- Improve the use of data and technology
- Strengthen key transition points, identify treatment gaps, and increase the care continuum
- Strengthen the recovery community

TiR then engaged in a discussion and voting process to determine which of the seven categories to prioritize and ranked recommendations according to level of impact and probability. The following categories emerged as the top three priorities:

- Inform state policies and educate policymakers
- Improve workforce development, provider education, and support
- Strengthen key transition points, identify treatment gaps, and enhance the care continuum

The next phase of TiR, dependent on available funding, will support refinement and implementation of high-impact and high-probability recommendations within the three priority areas. A *Together in Recovery* Advisory Committee (TRAC) will provide advice, strategic thinking, idea development, and industry knowledge for achieving TiR goals, objectives, and priorities. The TRAC will also look to embed racial equity in all priorities.

# 8

## Next Steps: Recommendations for Collective Action

Initial steps in addressing the priorities include the following:

- 1. Encourage** adoption of the Words Matter pledge—created by the Grayken Center for Addiction at Boston Medical Center—to spread the use of destigmatizing language
- 2. Commission** research on barriers to care and increasing the evidence base on multiple pathways for treatment and recovery
- 3. Develop** a “Know-Your-Rights and Protections Toolkit” for people seeking OUD treatment and recovery services and their loved ones
- 4. Participate** in efforts to inform state polices and educate policymakers about OUD treatment, recovery supports, and person-centered care
- 5. Promote** person-centered care:
  - Disseminate a Principles of Care statement developed by TiR
  - Host a “Person-Centered Care Bi-annual Summit” that enables providers across the care continuum to share case studies and best practices
- 6. Promote** regional coalitions and statewide collaboration to strengthen accessible, integrated treatment and recovery network
- 7. Support** programs and initiatives in creating OUD workforce opportunities, especially those focused on including people and leaders with lived experience, and those of color
- 8. Support** the state’s efforts to create a culture of harm reduction by promoting best practices and shared learnings



## In Closing

Halting a disease as insidious, persistent, and deadly as OUD takes an unprecedented team—medical experts, payers, people with lived experience of recovery, educators, employers, community groups, elected officials, faith-based communities, and committed benefactors. Given the important work that many stakeholders and community leaders have underway throughout Massachusetts, RIZE and TiR commit to never duplicating efforts already in motion. We will lift up and bring forward partnerships and projects that may not happen without additional support, and partner with and support organizations with expertise in these areas.

## Thank You

RIZE Massachusetts Foundation thanks the many people and organizations involved in preventing and responding to OUD in Massachusetts who participated in this initiative and shared their experiences to inform this blueprint. We highly value the work you do every day and your contributions to TiR.

We are very grateful to those who shared their recovery journeys and lived experiences. Your expertise is invaluable.

**Learn more  
about RIZE**

**Visit [rizema.org](http://rizema.org)**

