



CREATING CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY:

Harm Reduction as a Pathway to **Autonomy,**
Connection, and Healing

Innovations in Addiction Treatment and Harm Reduction
RIZE Massachusetts

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Executive Director

NATIONAL
HARM REDUCTION
COALITION

National Harm Reduction Coalition creates spaces
for **dialogue and action** that help heal the harms caused
by racialized drug policies.



Policy &
Advocacy



National &
Regional
Conferences



Trainings &
Technical
Assistance



Overdose
Prevention



Resources &
Publications



“WE CAN KEEP YOU ALIVE LONG
ENOUGH TO GET COVID”

- syringe service program
executive director

Poll question

How much money has the United States spent on the war on drugs since 1971?

- A) 5 billion
- B) 100 billion
- C) 1 trillion

Diminishing life expectancy

Longest sustained decline in expected life span in more than a century

Escalating suicides

Overdose crisis

How will COVID -19 impact life expectancy?

COVID complicated the response

OD fatalities are rising across the US

Social isolation

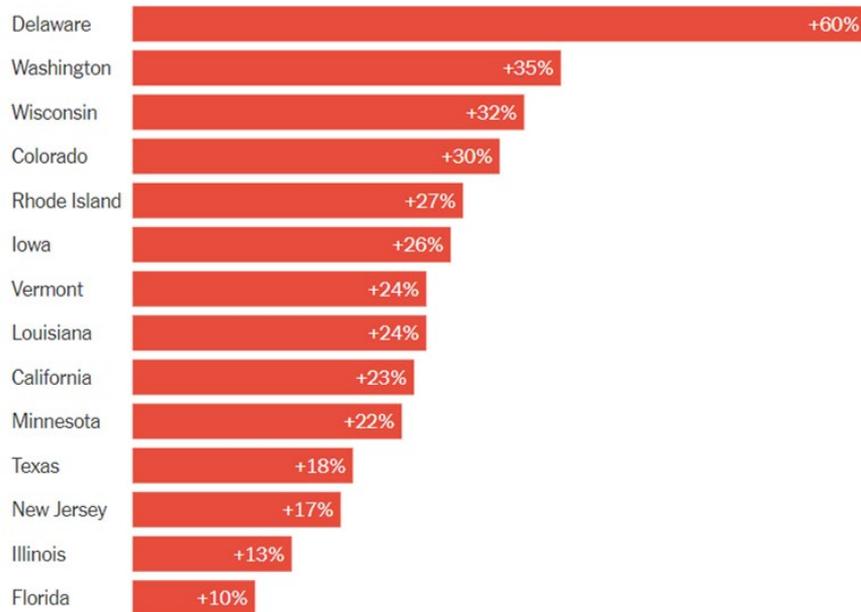
Restricted in-person treatment

“Virtual” tx and support limited to people with access

Syringe service and naloxone distribution programs already at capacity

Drug-related deaths have risen in 2020 in states across the country.

Increase in drug-related deaths from 2019 through the first portion of 2020.



All data is provisional. Definitions of what counts as a drug-related death vary by state. Data for Arizona, California, Florida, Minnesota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin includes only a subset of counties within each state.

Source: State and local health departments, coroners and medical examiners



STIGMA & COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Stigma

Darwinism: “Stop caring about the opioid crisis because the only people dying are weak and ‘deserve’ to die.”

Lacking willpower: “Methadone is just a crutch.”

Ungodly: “Addiction is a moral failing.”

Just say no: “They won’t change until they hit rock bottom.”

NIMBY-ism: “Why do they have to live in my neighborhood?”

Stigma

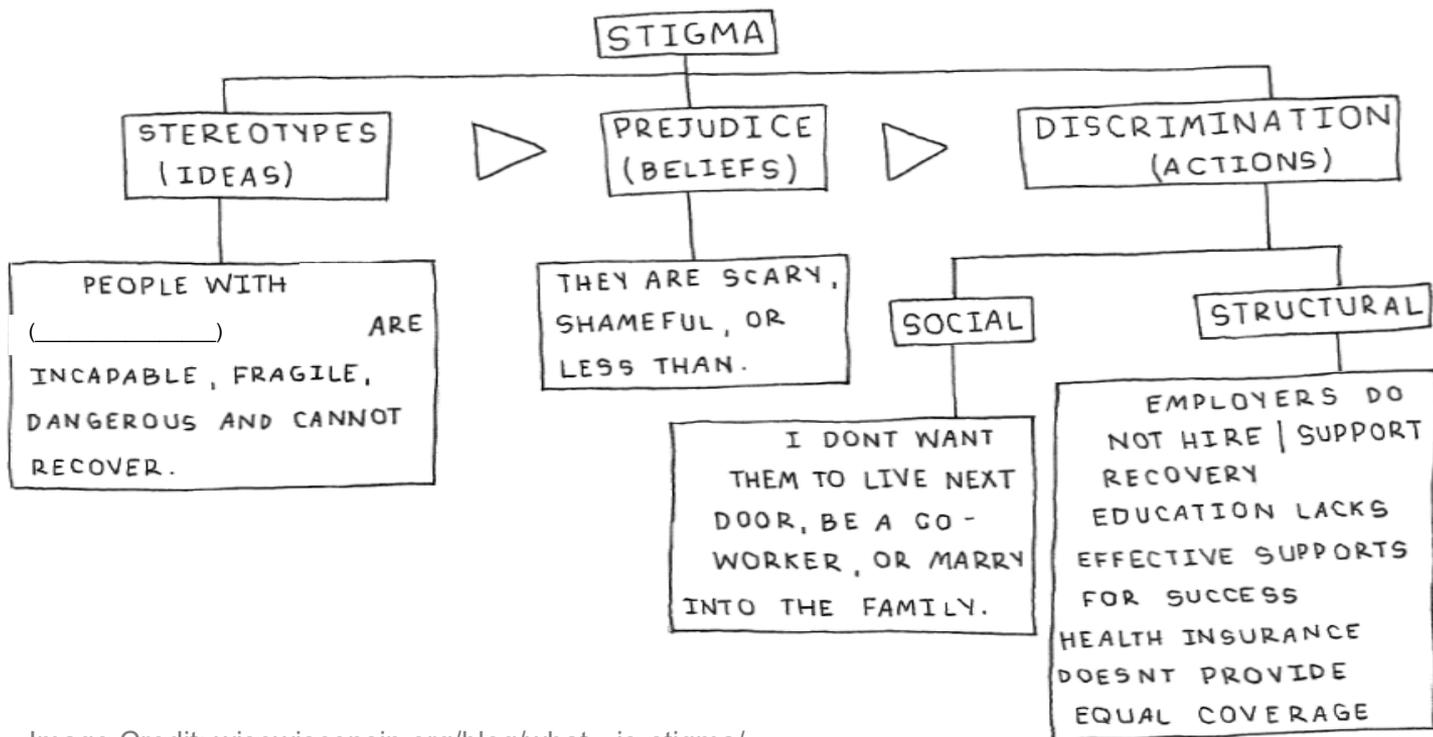


Image Credit: wisewisconsin.org/blog/what-is-stigma/

Collective trauma

Collective trauma is extraordinary in that it can bring distress and negative consequences to individuals and change the entire fabric of a community (Erikson, 1976)

Every single person you meet is



Repeating a
cycle of
generational
trauma



or carrying
the burden
of breaking
cycles.

Collective trauma

Impact on society

Collective trauma can impact relationships, alter policies and governmental processes, alter the way society functions and even change its social norms (Chang, 2017; Hirschberger, 2018; Saul, 2014).



Source: Jordan Hopkins/unsplash

Collective trauma

Impact on individuals

Illness

Financial difficulties and poverty

Death

Job loss

Changes to daily routine

Increased violence

Social isolation

Grief, confusion, distress, shame

Shelter in place

Oppression, segregation

COVID 19 and the opioid crisis share similar effects

Case study

Erik + COVID 19

Has been feeling “off”

Watching the news and loved ones battling illness leaves him feeling helpless, depressed, and unmotivated

Most days he feels exhausted, plagued with headaches, and body aches

Old coping skills aren't working anymore

Increasingly difficult to ask for help

Alexa turn my feelings off



Stigma and trauma threaten safety and survival.

Support builds internal motivation for change.



HARM REDUCTION



Holes in the safety net

The same level of consciousness
that gave rise to the war on drugs
won't solve it

PRINCIPLES OF HARM REDUCTION

Health and
Dignity

Participant
Centered
Services

Participant
Involvement

Participant
Autonomy

Sociocultural
Competency

Pragmatism
and Realism

Personal autonomy

Recovery is a process of change through which people improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.

SAMHSA working definition of recovery, 2012

We are a **movement**

Harm Reduction

shifts power and resources to people
and communities most vulnerable to
structural violence.

WE DID IT!

**AUSTIN INVESTS IN HARM REDUCTION
AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO POLICING**



**COMMUNITY, NOT POLICING!
HEALTH, NOT HANDCUFFS!**

Signs of **hope**

Signs of **progress**



“We come from a tradition of being an **alternative** to mainstream systems public health and behavioral health systems, where racism and discrimination are also rampant.

We see a future where cops do not hold this power or wield violence, where people who use drugs are treated with **dignity and respect.**”

Joy Rucker

Former ED, Austin Harm Reduction Alliance

(and New Bedford native!)



INTERCONNECTION

IS OUR STRENGTH

The background of the image is a complex network diagram. It consists of numerous small, semi-transparent nodes in various colors (grey, teal, orange, red, black) connected by thin, light grey lines. The nodes are scattered across the frame, with a higher density of connections and nodes on the right side. The overall effect is a sense of interconnectedness and complexity.

The greatest illusion
in this world is the
illusion of separation



#healthnothandcuffs

#communitynotpolicing

#harmreductionsaveslives

Thank you!
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