

Closing the Substance Use Care Gap Act

The overwhelming majority of people who need substance use treatment do not receive it. For those who want treatment, some of the most common reasons preventing them are not being ready to stop using and not knowing where to find programs that offer services they want or need.¹ Harm reduction is essential for keeping people alive and closing the gap between those who want treatment and those who actually receive it.² It offers low-barrier health care options to people struggling with substance use and provides an opportunity for engagement about effective treatments that meet people where they are. It can also create touchpoints for health care professionals to refer patients to evidence-based treatment and recovery support services.

Harm reduction is an evidence-based approach that equips people with lifesaving tools, information, and low-barrier care to prevent overdoses and infectious disease transmissions.³ It includes interventions such as the distribution of overdose reversal medications (e.g., naloxone), fentanyl test strips (FTS), and low-threshold buprenorphine initiation to treat addiction.⁴ These health care options offer lifesaving support for people struggling with substance use and are critical for combating the opioid crisis.⁵

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has identified harm reduction as a key pillar of its Overdose Prevention Strategy,⁶ and the White House National Drug Control Strategy argues harm reduction is vital for providing resources to people at the highest risk of overdose or poor health outcomes.⁷ Despite the demand and effectiveness of harm reduction services, they remain substantially underfunded at the state and federal level.⁸

In March 2021, Congress appropriated \$30 million through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) to award grants for community-based harm reduction programs and services.⁹ Administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), this Harm Reduction Grant Program supported overdose prevention programs, overdose reversal medications, and other harm reduction activities.¹⁰ While this funding marked an important step, it has not been made permanent and the Harm Reduction Grant Program has not been reauthorized.

The *Closing the Substance Use Care Gap Act* would address the opioid epidemic by:

- **Permanently reauthorizing** SAMHSA's Harm Reduction Grant Program.
- **Supporting lifesaving programs** offered by state, Tribe, local, and territorial governments; nonprofit community-based organizations; opioid treatment programs; medication assisted treatment (MAT) programs; and other primary and behavioral health organizations.
- **Expanding access to substance use care**, such as overdose prevention programs and the distribution of opioid reversal medications like naloxone; legally authorized or permitted syringe services programs to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases for individuals who use substances; overdose education, harm reduction treatment and counseling, treatment services, recovery support services, and health education; and helping people who use substances take steps to promote their health and safety.
- **Connecting people to substance use care** by requiring grant recipients to establish processes, protocols, and mechanisms for referral to evidence-based treatment and recovery support services.
- **Providing technical assistance to support programs in rural and underserved communities.**

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-National-Drug-Control-Strategy.pdf>

² Ibid

³ <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/harm-reduction>

⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-National-Drug-Control-Strategy.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11409926/>

⁶ <https://www.hhs.gov/overdose-prevention/>

⁷ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-National-Drug-Control-Strategy.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/text>

¹⁰ <https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grant-announcements/sp-22-001>