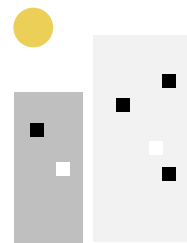


# Harm Reduction in NYC Shelters:

## 2023-2024 Strategic Plan

NYC Department of Homeless Services



Overdose is the leading cause of death among people experiencing homelessness in New York City (NYC). In accordance with the NYC “Right to Shelter” law, DHS is primarily charged with providing temporary shelter for all New Yorkers in need. DHS serves over 100,000 people each year – over 60,000 on any given night - in over 300 shelters managed by various contracted providers, resulting in a highly complex service delivery system. DHS serves as a safety net for people experiencing homelessness, many of whom have serious chronic medical, mental health and substance use conditions. To address the high number of overdoses among homeless individuals, DHS became a New York State certified Opioid Overdose Prevention Program in 2016, and routinely trains staff and clients in overdose response and naloxone administration. Due to this successful program, naloxone was administered in approximately 94% of over 1,250 suspected overdoses in shelter in 2021. However, DHS has had limited resources and capacity to provide the full range of evidence-based harm reduction prevention interventions necessary to address the needs of new, existing and returning clients.

In 2022, DHS received new funding from the Substance Use and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) and Healing NYC to develop and implement a *NYC Harm Reduction in Shelter Strategic Plan*. To formulate the plan, DHS reviewed 1) NYS and NYC laws; 2) DHS policies, procedures and programs that cover substance use; 3) evidence-based interventions recommended by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) and [SAMHSA](#); 4) the Toronto shelter-focused [Harm Reduction 10 Point Plan](#); and 5) recent assessments of DHS staff and client harm reduction knowledge, attitudes, skills, beliefs and perceived needs.<sup>1</sup> DHS used relevant findings and recommendations from the review to develop a two-year plan that aims to enhance DHS systems, promote a harm reduction environment in shelter, and improve DHS staff capacity to provide evidence-based harm reduction services to clients. DHS will implement this plan in 2023 and 2024, monitor progress and report on outcomes annually.

### Goal

To build capacity of the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS)-affiliated staff<sup>2</sup> to carry out evidence-based harm reduction interventions<sup>3</sup> to reduce overdose in shelter.

### Objectives

- Enhance DHS systems to guide and monitor harm reduction service delivery
- Promote a harm reduction environment in shelter
- Improve DHS-affiliated staff and client readiness to carry out harm reduction best practices
- Increase client access to harm reduction-based programs and services

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<sup>1</sup> Assessment findings: low awareness of where to find harm reduction and medication assisted treatment, need for training.

<sup>2</sup> DHS affiliated staff includes all staff working in the DHS system, including central administration, shelter staff, security, clinical staff and others who have any impact on clients, whether DHS staff or contracted providers.

<sup>3</sup> Evidence-based interventions include naloxone, education, counseling, safety planning, linkage to care support, syringe service programs, medication assisted treatment, and vocational support and employment.

## Activities

- 1. Update DHS substance use-related policies and procedures to align with a harm reduction approach,** by December 2023.
  - Provide training and technical assistance for 40 shelters with the highest number of drug and alcohol incident reports to develop and implement a site-specific harm reduction action plan using a **template** provided by DHS. Report on pre-post implementation status by December 2024.
- 2. Enhance DHS-affiliated staff training to promote a harm reduction approach:**
  - Develop an online harm reduction awareness and capacity building campaign targeting DHS-affiliated staff that provides information, guidance, resources, best practices, and opportunities such as training, conferences, and funding. Disseminate quarterly emails starting March 2023.
  - Continue to provide *Overdose Response and Naloxone Train-the-Trainer* and ensure there is an Overdose Champion at each shelter responsible for providing naloxone training and kits for shelter staff and clients.
  - Develop a new *Harm Reduction Training* for all DHS-affiliated staff. Start providing in January 2023.
  - Train shelter intake and assessment case managers to provide a brief universal harm reduction intervention including risk reduction and referral information for all DHS clients regardless of whether they disclose substance use, starting March 2023.
- 3. Support shelter-based clinical providers to provide onsite evidence-based substance use treatment,** including medication assisted treatment. Start promoting accredited training opportunities through the harm reduction awareness campaign and provider meetings in January 2023.
- 4. Enhance DHS data management systems to capture key harm reduction data<sup>4</sup>** in structured fields. Progressively use data as it becomes available to monitor compliance with updated substance use-related policies and procedures, conduct quality improvement, and report on outcomes annually.

## Outcomes expected by December 2024

- Increase the number of DHS staff and clients trained as Overdose Responders by 10%.<sup>5</sup>
- 70% of DHS staff will complete Harm Reduction training.
- 50% of new single adult DHS clients will receive universal harm reduction education.
- Increase safety planning, referrals, and linkage to prevention services after a non-fatal suspected overdose incident in shelter by 25%.<sup>6</sup>

## Sustainability Planning

- Secure resources for dedicated harm reduction-focused staff to work at shelters reporting more than 20 overdoses per year, by December 2025.
- Report on the *NYC Harm Reduction in Shelter Strategic Plan* outcomes annually.
- Update the *NYC Harm Reduction in Shelter Strategic Plan* every two years.

<sup>4</sup> Structured data: suspected overdose, naloxone administered, risk reduction counseling and naloxone training provided.

<sup>5</sup> In 2021, 5,165 staff and 2,106 clients were trained as Overdose Responders.

<sup>6</sup> In 2022, referrals to behavioral health services were documented in CARES after approximately 22% of non-fatal suspected overdoses.