



Harm Reduction: A Consensus Statement of Support by Michigan's 10 Community Mental Health Entities (Pre-Paid Inpatient Health Plans)

Michigan has a comprehensive infrastructure of prevention, treatment and recovery services for people living with a substance use disorder (SUD). Individuals living with a SUD, however, often follow a bumpy road to recovery and sobriety. Social stigma, judgment from others and shame are barriers to individuals seeking treatment. Even after people have engaged in treatment, they can stumble on that road and relapse. Most people living with addictions, however, do recover. A 2017 [Harvard study](#) found that while 10% of the U.S. adult population has had a SUD, 9.1% of American adults are in recovery. Despite that, [per the CDC](#), the U.S. exceeded 107,000 drug overdose deaths in 2021 largely related to heroin, methamphetamine and cocaine being laced with synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

Harm reduction is an evidence-based strategy to keep people alive by supporting those struggling with active substance use *wherever they are* in their journey to recovery. If they are still using substances, a harm reduction approach works to lower the chance of overdose or of contracting Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis C (HCV) or other diseases. Harm reduction strategies include distribution of naloxone, the overdose reversal medication that's saved many lives, and Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) which offer education about and connections to treatment pathways as they concurrently safely dispose of used syringes and distribute sterile syringes.

The myth that distributing sterile syringes increases drug use by enabling people to keep using drugs has been thoroughly discredited. In fact, individuals who use syringe service programs are 5 times more likely to engage in treatment and 3 times more likely to quit using drugs than individuals with a SUD that do not use an SSP (per [CDC](#)). Syringe Service Programs are not associated with any increase in crime (per [NIH](#)) and studies show that for every one dollar spent on harm reduction efforts, \$3 is saved in public health costs. Programs have also been shown to result, for example, in a 50% reduction in incidence of HIV and HCV (per [NIH](#)). By any measure, Syringe Service Programs are an effective means to save lives and keep people healthy along their journeys to recovery in our communities.

As the Mental Health Code – designated Community Mental Health Entities, Michigan's Prepaid Inpatient Health Plans (PIHPs), the regional entities that oversee the state's public behavioral health system, strongly endorse evidence-based practices like harm reduction. We are working to create a coordinated seamless continuum of care including prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. Along those lines, 86 SSP sites have been established around the state. We strongly support the work of Michigan's Syringe Service Programs in helping save lives of people who may be struggling with substance misuse or are in the early stages of recovery. We encourage our community partners to do the same.

ENDORSED AND ADOPTED BY ALL TEN OF MICHIGAN'S PRE-PAID INPATIENT HEALTH PLANS/
DESIGNATED COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH ENTITIES, OCTOBER 4, 2022