

Public Health Crisis in Austin



THRA
Texas Harm Reduction Alliance

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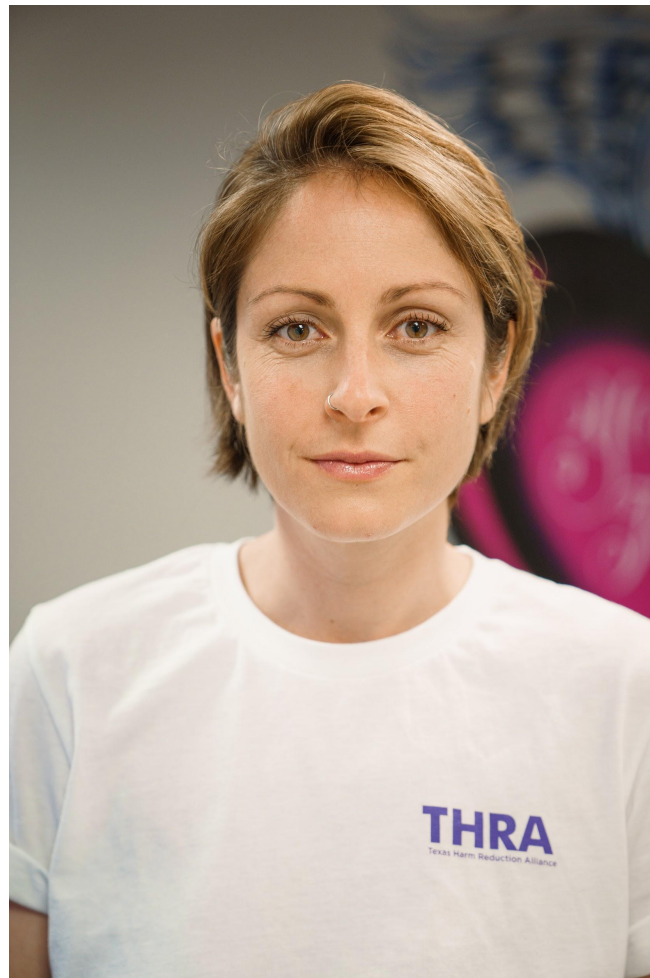
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Introductions in the Chat!

- Name
- Pronouns if you want
- Location
- Community and/or professional role

Today's Presentation

- Quick overview of key concepts
- Introduce Texas Harm Reduction Alliance and our work
- Discuss the overdose crisis in Austin
- Immediate and long-term actions to address overdose

The War on Drugs – what is it?

- Over the last 50 years, the U.S. has spent trillions of dollars on the drug war, expanding policing and incarceration of Black, brown, and poor people
- It has done nothing to curb drug use, and has instead fueled the current overdose crisis we're witnessing across the nation today
- **The War on Drugs is a human rights disaster. It's impacts extend far beyond arrest and incarceration—it includes education, healthcare, housing, immigration, employment, and more**
- The drug war has deeply destabilized people's lives: trapped people in poverty, broken up families, taken people's homes, and robbed employees of their wages and job opportunities, as examples

Harm reduction – what is it?

“Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs.”

- National Harm Reduction Coalition

Common harm reduction strategies

- Syringe access/distribution
- Medication assisted treatment
- Naloxone access/distribution
- Wound care
- Safer use education
- Drug testing
- Safer consumption spaces

Harm reduction evidence

- Syringe access is nearly universally regarded as effective as a HIV/Hepatitis C, as well as wound care, intervention
 - Over 75% drop in HIV infections in DC since implementation of needle exchange
- Also understood to be helpful as a point of entry into treatment and other medical care
 - SSP participants 5x more likely to enter treatment than non-participants

Texas Harm Reduction Alliance

- Founded in 2019
- Services
 - Drop-In Center
 - Outreach Team
 - Mobile Clinic
- Advocacy
 - Local and state
- Training



Important context:

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

City Council supports the City Manager in current efforts to address the escalating public health and public safety situation caused by opioid abuse, and encourages greater interdepartmental coordination and regional coordination with

healthcare, and service providers to research national best practices, community health and wellness. The City Council urges the City

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

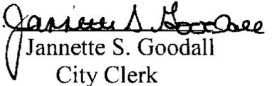
City Council directs the City Manager to evaluate critical needs as early as possible and prepare any necessary funding requests during the Fiscal Year 2018-2019 budget adoption process. Staff recommendations should consider, without limitation:

- Increased epidemiological surveillance and monitoring;
- Public education and health promotion;
- Evidence-based prevention and harm reduction initiatives;
- Criminal justice diversion programs;
- Increased funding for a range of treatment and recovery options;
- Naloxone kits and first-response training; and
- Other best practices identified through interdepartmental and regional collaboration.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

City Council directs the City Manager to report on the progress of these efforts and proposed trackable outcomes, and provide program or policy recommendations, by August 31, 2018.

ADOPTED: May 24, 2018

ATTEST 
Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk

Overdose Crisis in Austin and Travis County

- The latest data shows that 308 people died of preventable overdose in Travis County in 2021 – up by more than 50 deaths from 2020 - and is now the leading cause of accidental deaths.
- Of those 308 drug related accidental deaths, Travis County lost 118 people to a fentanyl related overdose death, up from 35 people in 2020, representing a 237% increase.
- Drug toxicity is now the number one cause of accidental deaths in Travis County, ahead of both falls and motor vehicle fatalities
- Meanwhile, **3,160** people experiencing homelessness on any given night in Austin, face disproportionate risk to preventable overdose.
- From state to local data - and even **predictions** from the CDC - it is clear that 2022 will be the deadliest year on record.

Issues impacting rising overdose deaths:

- Lack of housing
- Continued camp sweeps
- Lack of harm reduction training/expertise in service providers
- Wait lists for methadone
- Health professionals not utilizing a harm reduction approach
- Criminalization of substance use and poverty

Immediate Needs

- Building a robust harm reduction infrastructure in Austin
- Expand access to Naloxone/Narcan
- Require relevant agencies to make aggregated data relevant to the overdose crisis available
- Stop the sweeps!
- Identify and increase capacity for harm reduction strategies in new housing developments, shelters, and transitional hotels
- Intentional spaces for community-led discussions on urgent needs and solutions
- Opposing penalties and further criminalization of people who unknowingly possess or sell fentanyl

Long-Term Needs

- Syringe service program authorization
- Diverse housing options that meet the needs of current/former drug users
- Service providers trained and embrace harm reduction values and strategies
- Safe supply
- Overdose prevention centers

Other resources:

National Harm Reduction Coalition:

- [Harm reduction issues](#)
- [Homelessness and Harm Reduction](#)

Drug Policy Alliance:

- [Policing and the Drug War](#)
- [Drug Education Resources](#) (for educators, parents, young adults)
- [Rethinking the “Drug Dealer”](#)

Questions?



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