December Newsletter

NYC Opens Nation’s First Overdose Prevention Center

In a victory over a decade in the making, New York City has become the first place in the United States to open overdose prevention centers (OPCs). This unprecedented win, which will save countless lives, follows years of advocacy by the Drug Policy Alliance, V\-OC\-AL-NY, and other harm reductionists with radical visions.

“This is not just a win for New York City but for our national movement to inspire people’s imaginations. It shows that it’s possible to build an approach to drugs that embraces people’s dignity and wellbeing – without fear, stigma, or criminalization,” said Kassandra Frederique, DPA’s executive director, on Tuesday – after the first OPCs were announced. “From San Francisco to Boston, from Seattle to Philly, from courthouses to statehouses, each year we came closer and closer to seeing a legal overdose prevention center open, but our ultimate goal was always painfully thwarted in the end. Until today.”

OPCs – also known as supervised consumption sites – provide a safe space for people to consume pre-obtained drugs, without fear of arrest, under the supervision of trained staff. They provide people with access to sterile equipment and tools to check their supply for the presence of contaminants, such as fentanyl. OPCs also provide a crucial access point for people to receive healthcare, counseling, and referrals to social services – including drug treatment.

The need for OPCs in New York City is more urgent than ever. There were 2,062 overdose deaths in New York City in 2020, an increase of 37% from 2019, and the highest figure since records began.

OPCs have been operating in Europe since the 1980s and in Canada since 2003. There are over 120 sites operating worldwide. With our win in New York City, we anticipate more jurisdictions in the U.S. embracing this crucial tool. In addition to preventing and reducing overdose deaths, studies show that OPCs also increase enrollment in drug treatment services, reduce nuisances associated with public
injection – such as discarded needles and public intoxication, and save public resources. Millions of injections have taken place in existing facilities, yet not one overdose death has ever been documented in these facilities.

New York City’s two OPCs – the Washington Heights Corner Project and New York Harm Reduction Educators – are now operating in Manhattan, and will be forming a new organization – OnPoint NYC – to run the sites.

Take Action: Pass the MORE Act

This week marks one year since our historic victory when the U.S. House passed the MORE Act – the first time a chamber of Congress has ever approved a bill that would deschedule marijuana to end federal criminalization and repair the harms of prohibition.

Since then, we got the bill reintroduced in a new Congress, through the House Judiciary Committee, and secured more than 100 cosponsors. Despite commitments from leaders that the House would pass it again this year, it hasn't moved to a floor vote yet and there are only a few weeks left for the House to act. It's time to force House leadership to bring the MORE Act to a vote immediately.

Make your voice heard by sending an email to your Representative to tell leadership to let the House pass the MORE Act this year.

Take Action Now.

DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

FEATURED POST: #WorldAIDSDay
In recognition of World AIDS Day, DPA tweeted a thread on how Portugal reduced rates of HIV, AIDS, and other infectious diseases with a comprehensive drug decriminalization effort.

Follow DPA on Twitter.

**Overdose Deaths Exceeded 100,000 in First Year of Pandemic**

More than 100,000 people died of an overdose in the U.S. between April 2020 and April 2021, according to new federal data. This is the highest overdose death toll for a 12-month period since records began, and a 28.5% jump from the previous 12 months.

“These numbers are heartbreaking and further proof that criminalization and racially-motivated enforcement-first approaches to drugs are not working. In fact, these approaches have fueled the overdose crisis by pushing people into risky situations, making the drug supply unregulated and unsafe, and wasting resources on punishment instead of harm reduction and other health-services proven to save lives,” said Maritza Perez, director of DPA’s Office of National Affairs.

To counter this crisis, DPA joined the National Harm Reduction Coalition, People’s Action, and VOCAL-NY to lead a coalition of 240 civil rights, drug policy, criminal justice reform, public health, and faith-based organizations in urging members of Congress to pass legislation that will prioritize public health.
“Passing these critical pieces of legislation is not only more urgent than ever before – it’s literally a matter of life and death for so many people. The U.S. Government has targeted and criminalized our communities for drugs over the last 50 years as a political ploy which has only fueled the overdose crisis. With countless more lives at stake, it’s time to stop playing politics and continuing down this ill-fated path,” Perez said.

Learn more.

Pick Up Some DPA Swag for the Holiday Season

Whether you’re looking for the perfect shirt, poster, book, or other unique gift for the holidays, our store has something for everyone – including a bunch of free educational resources.

Shop now with checkout code EndTheDrugWar to get 25% off everything when you spend $30 or more!

Checkout code valid through 12/25.

Drug Policy in the News


Washington Post: Democratic Divide Puts Congressional Action On Marijuana
In Doubt

Rolling Stone: The War on Drugs Failed, But the Suffering It Caused Continues

Vice: Cops Are Needlessy Scaring People with Fentanyl-Laced Weed Stories


Truthout: Elizabeth Warren Urges Biden to Free People Imprisoned on Marijuana Charges

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Put DPA in your will or estate plan. Find out more about how to join The Ashawna Hailey Planned Giving Society today.

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