August Newsletter

Rhode Island Becomes First State to Authorize Harm Reduction Centers to Prevent Overdose Deaths

On July 7, Rhode Island Governor Daniel McKee signed a bill into law authorizing a two-year pilot program of harm reduction centers to prevent drug overdoses. This makes Rhode Island the first state in the country to authorize the establishment of such facilities. Harm reduction centers – also called supervised consumption services, supervised injection facilities, or overdose prevention services – are facilities where people can consume pre-obtained substances under the supervision of trained staff in a hygienic and safe space.

Hundreds of evidence-based, peer-reviewed studies have proven that harm reduction centers help prevent overdose deaths, do not encourage additional drug use, and provide an entry to treatment for those that want it. They also reduce risky injecting and transmission of infectious diseases, including HIV, hepatitis C, and hepatitis B, and improve public order, reduce crime, and are cost-effective. These services are intended to complement – not replace – existing prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services.

“This victory in Rhode Island gives us hope that there are policymakers that are willing to actually lead and do what needs to be done to save lives in the face of one of the worst public health crises of our time,” said Lindsay LaSalle, DPA’s managing director of policy.

“With at least 92,000 of our friends and family members lost to overdose in 2020 alone, we simply cannot wait any longer. We have to use every public health resource at our disposal – especially the ones we know work. And we have to do it now. There are mountains of evidence, from years and years of experience in other countries, to show that these centers save lives, increase the likelihood of a person entering treatment, and provide people access to other vitally important health resources.”
Senators Unveil Federal Marijuana Descheduling Bill

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR), and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) have released a draft bill to federally deschedule marijuana: the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act.

The bill would deschedule marijuana federally, expunge prior convictions, allow people to petition for resentencing, maintain the authority of states to set their own marijuana policies, and remove collateral consequences for people who have been criminalized for marijuana.

The bill would also impose a federal tax on marijuana products and put some of that revenue toward grant programs meant to support people from communities most impacted by prohibition who want to participate in the industry. However, the bill includes language that could exclude some people with prior marijuana convictions from getting required federal permits to operate legally in the industry.

“We have been clear from day one that any federal marijuana reform bill must be equally comprehensive to the devastation that has been caused by prohibition, particularly in Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities,” said Maritza Perez, director of DPA’s Office of National Affairs.

“To our dismay, the Senate draft contains exclusionary language that ended up getting added to the House-passed MORE Act last year that would continue to subject federal employees to drug testing and deny certain individuals—who have already paid the highest price—the opportunity to expunge their records. In order for this bill to truly end marijuana prohibition in a comprehensive way and begin to repair the egregious harms of the past, we cannot continue to make room for some to be left out because of laws that were unjust and racist to begin with.”

Learn more.

Take Action: Tell Biden Not to Go Backwards on Drug Policy
Earlier this year, Congress and President Biden extended a terrible Trump-era policy increasing the use of severe mandatory minimum sentences for fentanyl-related substances.

If you already know why this is harmful, please urge President Biden to let the policy expire and pursue a public health approach instead.

What’s the problem with this policy? First, research shows that prosecutors are twice as likely to pursue a mandatory minimum sentence for Black people as for white people charged with the same offense.

Second, for more than 50 years, the U.S. has been criminalizing people for using drugs and overdose has not decreased. In fact, it’s skyrocketing.

We are all concerned about overdose. But we know that harsher punishments for drugs will not solve the overdose crisis. Instead of doubling down on enforcement, we need a public health solution.

Tell President Biden to let the policy expire, stop ramping up harsh penalties for drugs, and pursue a public health approach instead.

Take action

DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

FEATURED POST: #EndTheDrugWar
See our post on Instagram.

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As Overdose Deaths Reach Record High, DPA Secures Historic 435% Funding Increase for Harm Reduction Services in Federal Spending Bill

On July 15, the House Appropriations Committee passed its FY22 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies spending bill. The bill allocates $69.5 million – a 435% increase from the $13 million that was allocated last year – to the CDC’s Infectious Diseases and Opioid Epidemic Program to expand access to syringe services programs.

Syringe services and harm reduction programs effectively help prevent drug overdoses and save lives. These programs have the knowledge, contacts, and ability to reach people who use drugs and provide naloxone and other overdose prevention resources. They also connect people to medical care and support, including substance use disorder treatment. This funding would assist these programs in preventing and reducing overdose deaths nationwide.
“This historic allocation shows that Congress is finally listening to directly impacted people and advocates like the Drug Policy Alliance and starting to reckon with this public health crisis in a way that makes sense – dedicating public health resources to increase access to care and support services – versus criminalization and other ineffective responses, which have only exacerbated the harm and cost us more lives,” said Maritza Perez, director of DPA’s Office of National Affairs.

Learn more.

DPA's Podcast, Drugs & Stuff: The Brotherhood Sister Sol’s Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles on the Drug War and the Education System

This podcast episode is the third in our series on Uprooting the Drug War, a project that shines a spotlight on the insidious ways the drug war has spread into the systems of child welfare, public benefits, employment, immigration, housing, and education.

In this month’s installment, Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles, from DPA-funded partner The Brotherhood Sister Sol, and DPA's Gabriella Miyares discuss how the drug war and the poisonous mentality around it have kept people in poverty and unable to access crucial public benefits.

Listen now on our website or on your favorite podcast streaming platforms. The podcast's full back catalog can be found here.

Drug Policy in the News


GQ: How American Attitudes About Drugs Changed Overnight

Marijuana Moment: D.C. Police Chief Says Illicit Marijuana Sales Tied To Violence As Congress Weighs Lifting Regulatory Blockade

AP: 50-Year War on Drugs Imprisoned Millions of Black Americans

Politico: Amazon Endorsed Legal Weed. Will It Now Fight to Make It Happen?

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