



# HEALTH IMPACTS

Overdose prevention centers (OPCs) are a public health tool that can have multiple health benefits for people who use drugs. OPCs are facilities designed to reduce the potential risks of drug use, including overdoses and the transmission of infectious diseases. They are a safe and monitored space that allow staff to intervene in the event of an overdose. Not only do OPCs exhibit substantial health benefits for people who use drugs, they can also connect people to receive further medical care they might not otherwise seek. **OPCs impact people's health positively by:**

**Reducing overdose deaths**   **Reducing infectious disease transmission**  
**Reducing hospital admissions & ED visits**   **Promoting safer behaviors**  
**Encouraging medical care**

## Reducing overdose deaths

In 2021, more than 107,000 overdose deaths occurred in the United States. OPCs give people access to resources that reduce the chance of overdose death.<sup>1</sup> They prevent overdoses by having staff readily available to address emergencies, and foster an environment that increases the safety and security of participants, even when they are not using an OPC. For example:



**Naloxone distribution** is one of the tools used to mitigate overdoses. By increasing access to naloxone kits, OPCs increase opportunities for overdose reversal in the community.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Trained staff** - OPCs are staffed by harm reduction workers and people with past experience of drug use, who provide harm reduction and drug use education to participants, leading to safer use practices.<sup>3</sup>

One study found that the use of an unsanctioned OPC in the United States resulted in improvements in key health outcomes for individuals, including reduced overdoses, hospitalizations and ED visits.

People who used the OPC within the 6-month period of the study had a

**24%**

decrease in overdoses (fatal and non fatal)<sup>8</sup>

Another study looked at a cohort of people who used an OPC in France and compared them to a group of people who used other harm reduction services.

The study found that over a year-long period there was a

**67%**

decrease in reported overdoses amongst the group that used the OPC.<sup>15</sup>



References can be found by scanning the QR code or by visiting [opcinfo.org/factsheetref](https://opcinfo.org/factsheetref)



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## Reducing hospital admissions & ED visits

As overdose deaths increase, so too does the burden on emergency medical services. In the United States, estimates suggest that drug-related problems account for 17 million emergency department visits and 8.7 million hospital admissions each year.<sup>4</sup> Of these hospital admissions, **one-third of them are preventable**.<sup>4</sup> Overdose prevention centers have been shown to reduce emergency department visits and hospital admissions.<sup>8</sup>



**Within the first two months of opening the first two OPCs in New York City in 2021 (OnPoint NYC), the sites had a total of 5,975 visits.**

Emergency medical services responded 5 times, and participants were transported to emergency departments only 3 times.

**No fatal overdoses** occurred in the OPCs or among the individuals transported to hospitals.<sup>6</sup>



**A U.S. unsanctioned OPC that opened in 2014 found decreases in hospitalizations and ED visits for individuals who visited the site.<sup>8</sup> Those who visited:**

were  
**27%**  
less likely  
to visit the  
ED

had  
**54%**  
fewer ED visits

were  
**32%**  
less likely to  
be hospitalized



**A French cohort study of OPC clients found a decrease in reported emergency department visits over twelve months.<sup>15</sup>**

**59%**



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## Reducing Infectious Disease Transmission

A French study of OPC clients found a decrease of

**79%**  
in reported abscesses.<sup>15</sup>

OPCs aim to reduce the spread of blood-borne diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C and injection-related injuries like abscesses and other soft tissue infections. OPCs reduce the spread of disease by facilitating access to sterile drug use equipment like clean needles, providing proper needle disposal, and encouraging safer injection practices.

## Promoting Safer Behaviors

**70%**  
reductions in needle sharing.

Two studies conducted in Vancouver and Denmark showed an association between using an OPC and a decrease in unsafe injection behaviors like reusing syringes. The studies also found that OPCs promoted positive changes in how people used drugs, like disposing syringes, swabbing the injection site and using clean water to inject, among other things.<sup>7,14</sup>

An analysis of three studies that looked at OPCs in Canada and Spain established an estimated decrease of 70% in needle sharing amongst those who used the sites, across the studies.<sup>7</sup>

One study in Vancouver found that those who used an OPC were less likely to report behaviors like needle sharing compared to those who did not use an OPC.<sup>12</sup>



Another study that looked at condom use over time amongst those who used an OPC in Vancouver suggested that using the facility can positively influence safe sex behaviors. After two years, the study showed that amongst those who used the site, condom use became more frequent amongst those who have casual sex partners and/or have partners living with HIV.<sup>9</sup>



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## Encouraging medical care

**OPCs can also address barriers to care by staffing nurses or other healthcare professionals to tend to those who use the facility.**

A qualitative study from Vancouver used interviews of people who used an OPC to highlight how the presence of nurses encouraged them to seek medical care. They felt less judged and cared for in these spaces.<sup>10</sup>

This finding was also seen in Denmark, where users of an OPC who were advised by OPC staff to get treatment were more likely to seek medical attention.<sup>11</sup>

In Montreal, a study found that amongst those who were hospitalized for injection-related infections, the hospital stays were shorter when they were referred to treatment by a OPC nurse.<sup>13</sup>



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