



Recovery-Ready Communities:

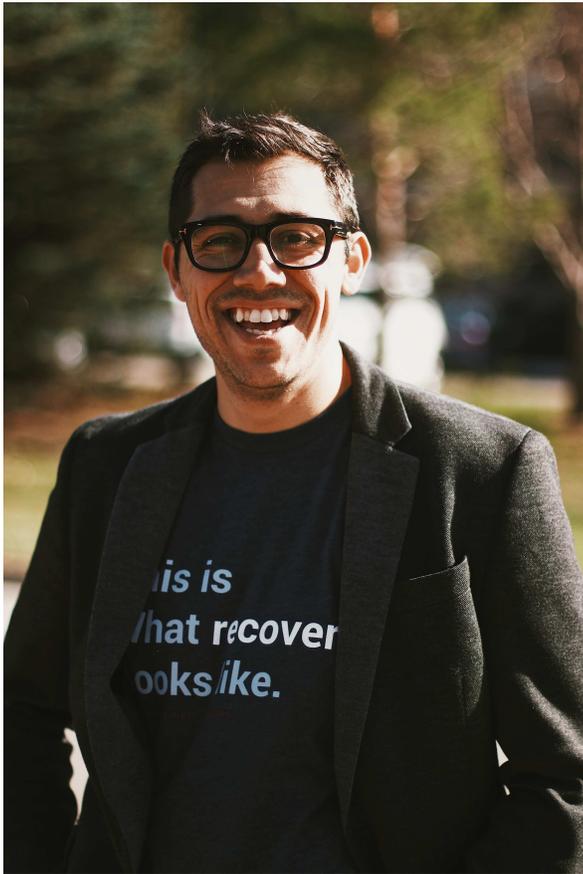
A Blueprint to Address the Substance Use
Crisis at the Local Level



YOUNG PEOPLE IN RECOVERY

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President & CEO's Introduction

In the midst of our nation's public health crisis around opioids and substance use, empowering people in recovery is one of the most important things we can do to restore communities and heal families. People in recovery can be transformative change agents, helping to navigate our way out of the addiction crisis.

Young People in Recovery (YPR) envisions a world where everyone can access the necessary resources to recover from substance use disorder. YPR's mission is to provide the training and networks all individuals, families and communities need to recover and maximize their full potential.

Even after the current substance use epidemic subsides—which it will in time—there will still be millions of people who need continued recovery support in order to lead lives that are healthy and purpose-driven. By creating communities that are recovery-ready, that provide seamless transitions to housing, education, employment and social supports for individuals in recovery, we will be better prepared to meet our country's long-term health needs.

Problem

Communities across the United States are grappling with high rates of accidental overdose and an ever-growing demand for treatment, criminal justice interventions and emergency services stemming from substance use disorders (SUD). Overdose has emerged as the leading cause of death for Americans under 50, killing more people than guns or car accidents. The crisis touches every part of our society regardless of economic status, race, gender or geography.

If our communities remain on their current trajectories, overdose rates, the spread of infectious diseases, economic impacts and an expanding burden on the criminal justice system will compound a situation already considered to be the largest public health crisis faced by America today. As community members, officials and advocates, we must work to address the crisis by utilizing innovative, evidence-based approaches to make our communities recovery-ready.

While the statistics and impacts of the crisis are jarring, many organizations, agencies and individuals are hard at work to end it. The model for a recovery-ready community is rooted in data and is a culmination of decades of trial and error in the prevention and treatment fields. In order to sustain long-term recovery, the best models integrate healthcare, the criminal justice system, employment, housing, education, harm reduction, and both formal and informal recovery supports. It is only in this way that communities will have a blueprint that tackles the substance use crisis on all fronts.

Background



While the opioid crisis is often the most talked-about component of America's substance use problem, we know that other substance use such as alcohol is also on the rise and that effective treatment interventions are currently addressing only a fraction of the need. According to the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 66.7 million people in the United States reported binge drinking in the past month and 27.1 million people were current users of illicit drugs or misused prescription drugs. Of these substance users, 21.7 million people aged 12 and up reported needing treatment for SUD, though only 10.8% of them (2.3 million people) received it.

Prevention



As the substance use crisis deepens, effective prevention has become even more critical. Prevention programming is often crafted with both a specific audience and environment in mind. The programs range from those aimed at adolescents in educational settings, those at an increased risk, and parents. Research conducted by the National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control clearly indicates that early prevention can positively affect outcomes and steer young people away from developing a substance use disorder. Knowing this, significant resources must be allocated to prevention programs that work.

Prevention research from the National Institute on Drug Abuse has identified the most common principles found in effective prevention programming. These include enhancing supportive factors while reducing risk factors; or the tailoring of a program to address risks specific to a certain population or audience characteristics, such as age, gender, and ethnicity, to improve the program's effectiveness.

An especially promising tool identified as effective in preventing substance use disorders is known as the Screening, Brief intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). SBIRT's three major components are described by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as:

1. **Screening** — a healthcare professional assesses a patient for risky substance use behaviors using standardized screening tools. Screening can occur in any healthcare setting
2. **Brief Intervention** — a healthcare professional engages a patient showing risky substance use behaviors in a short conversation, providing feedback and advice
3. **Referral to Treatment** — a healthcare professional provides a referral to brief therapy or additional treatment to patients who screen in need of additional services

Treatment

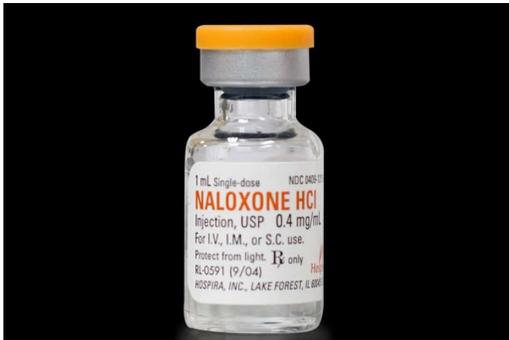
We know that treatment works in achieving long-term recovery outcomes; however, equitable and affordable access to evidence-based treatment is perhaps the most visible need in our communities currently. Of the 20.8 million Americans who meet the criteria for having a substance use disorder, only 2.2 million of those people received any treatment; of those 2.2 million, only 64% of them received specialty treatment specifically for substance use.

Too often, many of those struggling with SUD—and their families who are trying to help—are lacking the necessary resources to make informed decisions about the best SUD care. The combination of misinformation, marketing (by treatment centers or those who seek to profit by brokering patient referrals) and popular culture often serve as the only guides in times of crisis. Substance use disorder is a clinical issue, therefore there are many different clinical interventions to treat the condition. Many people assume that because they or their loved one has a problem with drugs or alcohol that the first step should be residential treatment like 30, 90, or 120 day programs where the individual is treated in a facility. While this intervention is necessary for a substantial portion of those struggling with substance use, it's not always the best option, even if patients can find available beds that are covered by their insurance (or can self-pay, if insurance won't cover an extended stay or if they don't have insurance).

Because of this fact, we must ensure that primary care physicians, public health workers, counselors and other professionals in the healthcare community are adequately trained to refer their patients to providers who can conduct evidence-based screenings to determine the appropriate level of care for the individual.

Substance use treatment costs can range from completely free to upwards of \$50,000 for a 30-day stay. Accessing services can be confusing and cause despair for many individuals and families who can't locate a bed or afford these type of programs. We must again increase access to resources and education for those seeking treatment to equip them with the knowledge necessary to make an informed decision about their or their loved one's care. Both professionally developed and crowd-sourced resource lists are available through agencies like SAMHSA and organizations like Capacity.com, but we must work across industries and communities to develop exhaustive materials to educate individuals on the options available to them and how to access those options when a loved one is in crisis.

Harm Reduction



It seems obvious to say it but people can't enter and sustain recovery if they're dead. For some people, abstinence is not an achievable goal but there are still ways of improving health outcomes and reducing risk which should be explored. This recovery pathway is known as "harm reduction." The Harm Reduction Coalition characterizes harm reduction as 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."

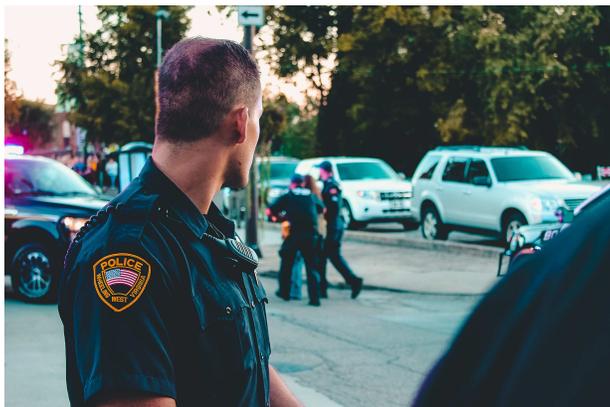
Although harm reduction has been controversial in the past, the medical community agrees that it is an integral component of a public health strategy to address the personal and community impact of substance use. The fact is that people have always and will always use drugs, despite the risks that go along with them.

From a public health, if not a moral point of view, society's goal should then be to mitigate the risks associated with substance use so that people can be empowered to take charge of their own health, which often leads to positive health outcomes further down the line.

Harm reduction-focused agencies are often best positioned to encourage recovery and connect those who use drugs to services and resources to help them become healthier, a primary component of holistic recovery. They also serve to limit the spread of disease like HIV, hepatitis and others, while educating people who use drugs and their loved ones on safer use, promoting individual and public health.

The harm reduction component of a recovery-ready community includes the development, accessibility and expansion of programs like syringe access, naloxone distribution, HIV/HEP testing/prevention, and supervised consumption. All of the programming mentioned previously are already producing positive outcomes in many of communities outside the U.S. in places like Europe and Canada, but supervised consumption remains unrealized in the U.S. as of November, 2018.

Judicial & Law Enforcement



Until recently, the prevailing attitude in the United States towards substance use was that because it was understood as a moral failure, it should be handled as a criminal justice issue. As drug laws became more widespread and severe, our law enforcement and judicial agencies have been stretched beyond their capacity. A National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA) report recently found that 65% of all U.S. prison inmates meet the criteria for having a substance use disorder, but only 11% receive any treatment. Today we know that incarcerating and arresting our way out of the problem has done little to actually reduce the consumption of drugs or the consequences stemming from the consumption of drugs.

Because of their clear connection and regular interaction with those struggling with substance use, the criminal justice system has itself been forced to develop innovative solutions to balance public safety and the treatment of the mental health conditions resulting in individual involvement in those systems. Solutions like treatment courts, jail/prison-based substance use treatment and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs are becoming more prevalent throughout the country, but they must be accessible, expanded and provided clear oversight to ensure those programs are meeting the needs of their participants based on research.

Housing



One of SAMHSA's dimensions of wellness necessary to sustain long-term recovery includes increased resources to meet the need for supportive, safe and accountable housing for those transitioning into recovery. We must make housing a priority for those with SUD and those emerging in their recovery. As recovery is a dynamic and highly personal journey, so too should be the range of housing options for those who are or may have struggled with substance use including those transitioning from homelessness, incarceration or treatment. When developing a housing model for a recovery community, key considerations include affordability, accessibility, safety and research.

A "housing first" approach to substance use is integral when attempting to transition a community's high-risk homeless population to becoming stabilized. Housing first is a model based on the elimination of preconditions to entry to permanent housing like treatment, abstinence or service requirements.

Evidence indicates it is virtually impossible to stabilize an individual who is experiencing a persistent mental illness or substance use disorder by attempting to treat the mental health concerns prior to their entry into permanent or semi-permanent housing.

Recovery residences, also known as "sober living" are a key component in a recovery-ready community. These facilities offer structured living, accountability, connection to community and monitored recovery. Unfortunately, the vast majority of recovery residences operating in our communities adhere to strict abstinence requirements for their clients. This means that many residences do not offer entry for those utilizing medication in the treatment of their substance use like methadone and buprenorphine. It is important to recognize that as many people have different pathways to recovery, we must provide them with supportive resources in that journey. Organizations like the National Alliance of Recovery Residences (NARR) are seeking to address the regulation of bad actors in the recovery residence industry and form state affiliates with the goal of oversight to ensure recovery residences are adhering to best practices and are offering safe suitable housing for their clients.

Education



Increasing the accessibility of supportive educational environments and opportunities to further an individual's education meets the need for the "intellectual" dimension of wellness developed by SAMHSA. Our communities must ensure equitable and fair access to educational opportunities, including recovery high schools and collegiate recovery support.

The Association of Recovery Schools (ARS) defines a recovery high school as "secondary schools designed specifically for students in recovery from substance use disorder or dependency." Although each school operates differently depending on available community resources and state standards, each recovery high school shares the following goals:

- To educate all available and eligible students who are in recovery from substance use disorder or co-occurring disorders such as anxiety, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

- To meet state requirements for awarding a secondary school diploma
- To support students in working a strong program of recovery

Collegiate recovery support exists in many forms to support students in higher education who may be experiencing substance use disorders or are in recovery from them. The Association of Recovery in Higher Education (ARHE) states that the goals of collegiate recovery programs (CRP) and collegiate recovery centers (CRC) are "to offer the chance for students in recovery from addiction to experience the opportunities that higher education offers both in the college environment, and after by providing support, preventing a return to use, and promoting academic performance." A recovery-ready community is supportive of those in or seeking recovery through its promotion and support of recovery high schools, CRPs and CRCs at local universities, trade schools, community colleges, and through public education.

Employment



SAMHSA's components of wellness also includes an "occupational" dimension. Job-readiness training for those in recovery combined with opportunities to gain stable and gainful employment to further support and empower those in recovery must become a major pillar of any community's response to the addiction crisis.

Employment plays an important role in individual recovery. Many of those who have struggled with substance use are likely to have had a hard time obtaining and keeping steady employment, are often under-employed, and have both criminal records, erratic job histories and poor credit scores that create barriers to securing employment beyond the entry or minimum wage level. Without access to **gainful** employment opportunities, many of those in early recovery are unable to meet the basic economic needs necessary for sustained recovery, making the likelihood of relapse/reoccurrence of use much higher.

Many organizations and agencies are now focusing on employment-readiness and connecting individuals to employers open to giving people an opportunity as they emerge in their recovery. Providing job search training, instruction on resume and cover-letter writing, interview prep and on-the-job skill development has proven effective for many people transitioning out treatment, incarceration, homelessness and substance use.

Recovery Support



SAMHSA defines recovery support as a broad spectrum of services that can be provided through treatment, aftercare, and community-based programs led by behavioral health care providers, peer providers, family members, friends and social networks, the faith community, and people with lived experience in recovery. Recovery support services help people enter into and navigate systems of care, remove barriers to recovery, stay engaged in the recovery process, and live full lives in communities of their choice. Our communities must expand equitable access to supportive environments and the many pathways to enhance recovery for both individuals and communities while also supporting the organizations and agencies working to implement recovery supports locally.

Recovery support is implemented in a variety of environments from mutual-aid support groups like 12-step fellowships and programs like Life Ring or Celebrate Recovery; while more structured recovery support exists in treatment, criminal justice environments and others. Structured recovery support often includes the pairing of a client with a mentor or peer support specialist to help the individual navigate systems of care, identify areas of strength/room for growth, connection to the recovery community and ongoing support from a peer with lived experience. Recovery support is meant to be culturally and linguistically competent, so it's important to consider the accessibility of recovery support in your community from a lens of cultural confidence. If you're not sure if your community is meeting this need, it's probably not.

Conclusion

While we're reminded of the horrors of the addiction crisis in the media daily, there are over 22 million Americans in recovery today. Agencies, organizations, coalitions, advocates and concerned community members are hard at work to develop infrastructures to support recovery and reduce SUD in those communities.

The recovery-ready community strategy was developed by carefully selecting the dimensions of a community response that have been shown to help individuals, families and communities enter and sustain long-term recovery. Today, it is opioids that most dramatically define the substance use crisis, but tomorrow it may be another substance, so it's important to remember that a community-based approach cannot be exclusively focused on opioid use. We need to establish lasting community-based recovery support infrastructures that will stand the test of time and be available whenever the next crisis hits.

A recovery-ready community is well resourced, culturally competent and is consistently working to develop, expand and oversee comprehensive recovery supports; enhance gainful employment opportunities and employment-readiness training; promote opportunities for individuals to continue or complete their educational goals; improve access to safe, affordable and suitable housing; expand public-health programs focused criminal justice interventions for those with substance use disorders; and broaden comprehensive, accessible and compassionate harm reduction services. **In a recovery-ready community, everyone would have equal access to affordable and evidence-based treatment as well as prevention strategies that really work.**

Young People in Recovery is one of countless organizations across the United States working to end the substance use crisis in our country. We're committed to making our communities recovery-ready and do so by developing local, state and national networks of volunteer leaders in recovery and their allies. YPR envisions a world where everyone can access the necessary tools to recover from substance use disorder and our mission is to work tirelessly to provide the training, skills and networks to help all individuals and families in every community recover and maximize their full potential. Learn more about how to get involved at youngpeopleinrecovery.org!