

THE ROLE OF TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES IN PUBLIC SAFETY-LED OVERDOSE PREVENTION

Trauma is caused by “an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individuals functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being” ([SAMHSA, 2014](#)).

Trauma can affect individuals, families, groups, communities or an entire society. Many Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities have past experiences with public safety personnel that resulted in trauma. As a result, certain individuals may not trust public safety officers when it comes to overdose prevention and response.

In addition, many public safety officers witness the effects of drug use and overdose among the communities they serve and can suffer from vicarious or secondary trauma themselves.

Trauma-informed approaches recognize that trauma affects many health and social problems. In overdose prevention and response, a trauma-informed approach means trying to understand the trauma experienced by individuals when interacting with them. It also means that public safety-led overdose prevention efforts should apply de-escalation and trust-building techniques.

The use of a trauma-informed approach can promote healing. It can also decrease the potential for re-traumatization. It shifts the focus from “What is wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” to acknowledge the trauma that individuals may have gone through.

There are six principles of trauma-informed care:

- 1. Safety.** Promote a sense of safety, calming and de-escalation.
- 2. Trustworthiness and transparency.** Build and maintain trust with the community.
- 3. Collaboration and mutuality.** Build strong community partnerships and include others in decision-making.
- 4. Empowerment, voice and choice.** Empower people to heal and recover from trauma.
- 5. Cultural, historical and gender issues.** Be responsive to specific cultural needs and avoid stigmatizing language.
- 6. Peer support.** Use support from individuals who have lived experience of trauma to promote recovery.



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