

What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction is a set of practices, policies, and ideas that reduce physical, mental, societal, and legal harm to drug users.

Examples of harm reduction include:

- Distributing naloxone (the opioid overdose antidote) to drug users and laypeople alike and teaching them how to respond to opioid overdose (OD).
- Providing free, clean syringes to injection drug users to reduce the spread of blood-borne diseases like HIV and HCV (hepatitis C), both of which are particular problems in rural Tennessee (1).
- Tobacco users (both smokers and dippers) adopting vaping to reduce the risks of cancer, emphysema, tooth loss, gum disease, heart problems, etc.
- Allowing general practitioners to prescribe opioid replacements like methadone and buprenorphine (Suboxone). There are only 19 medication-assisted treatment providers who prescribe Suboxone for the 254,000 people who live in Northwest Tennessee. There are only 2 methadone clinics in this region (2).
- Encouraging courts of law to stop prosecuting drug users and start treating substance use disorder as a mental health issue.
- Reading this brochure and simply learning about what harm reduction is.

Why should you care about harm reduction?

Did you grow up with someone — coworker, family member, friend, neighbors, or other community members — whose life has been harmed or even completely ruined by drug use?

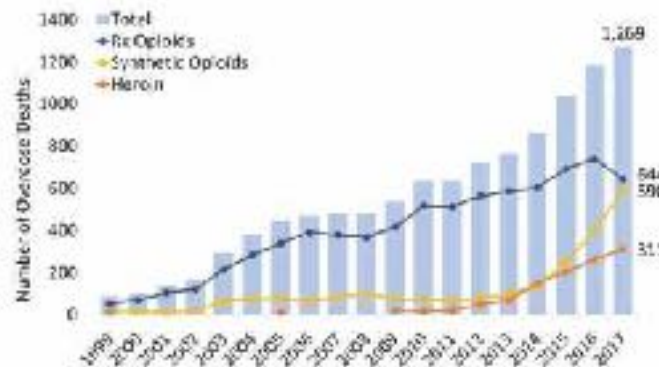
We all know drug users, though most people use drugs responsibly.

It'd be nice if we all avoided drugs, but that simply isn't how life works. Harm reduction is an alternative to drug use prevention. Just like prevention-based efforts, however, harm reduction recognizes the very real negative outcomes that can result from drug use.

We need to do something new if we want to reduce drug overdoses. Punishing drug use via the criminal justice system obviously isn't working. Why not try something new — how about harm reduction?

If you don't already support harm reduction, ask yourself this: Do we *really* want Tennesseans to keep dying from the opioid epidemic? (3)

Tennessee drug OD deaths, 1999-2017



Things you can do now:

- **Read and share this brochure.** Even though just *reading* something might not seem like you're helping out, education is the first step in helping improve outcomes for people who suffer from substance use disorder. Thank you for reading this brochure.
- **Stop differentiating between tobacco, alcohol, coffee, and illegal drugs — they're all drugs.** Cannabis, including low-THC, high-CBD hemp, coffee, tobacco, alcohol, prescription opioids for chronic pain, prescription stimulants for ADHD, cocaine, heroin, and meth are all drugs. If they change the way you feel, they're drugs.
- **Local government and community meetings are your friends.** Get involved and build relationships with stakeholders and fellow community members. The better rapport you have, the better you can advocate for our cause.
- **Talk about harm reduction with others.**
- **Donate to organizations that practice harm reduction.** Whether you donate cold, hard cash or volunteer your time, both forms of assistance are great, simple ways to advocate for harm reduction.
- **Distribute supplies.** Clean syringes, naloxone, fentanyl test strips, alcohol swabs, and tourniquets are all good to distribute to people who use drugs who might not have access to them.

Who made this brochure and why are you receiving it?

My name is Daniel Garrett. I was born and raised in Southern Middle Tennessee, but have lived in Northwest Tennessee — in Martin — since 2014. I grew up around drugs and am a long-term, often-problematic drug user.

I have seen countless people hurt by drugs. My mom died from lifelong substance use. One of my closest friends from high school has spent most of his adult life in prison due to his drug use.

These things aren't specific to me — all of us know people who fit into these categories.

Unfortunately, there are no government agencies or non-profit organizations here in Northwest Tennessee that practice harm reduction. So, in order to help my fellow drug users, I distribute syringes, naloxone, and other harm reduction supplies, I educate people about how to use drugs safely, create educational materials like this brochure, and publish drug-related articles online.

Find me on Twitter at @DanielGarrettHR.

Visit my website for more content like this — NorthwestTennesseeHarmReduction.home.blog.

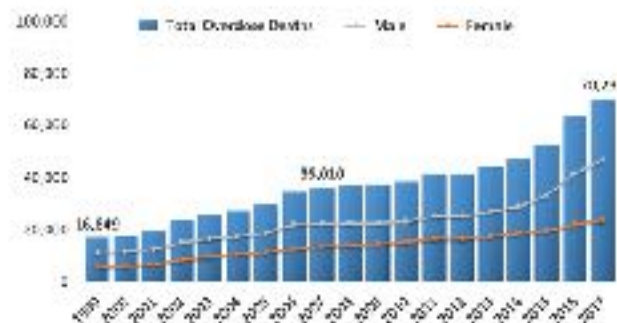
I publish articles on Medium, as well, at medium.com/@danpgarr.

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Evidence for harm reduction

1. Injection drug users who have access to syringe exchanges or syringe service programs are five (5) times more likely to seek treatment for their drug use and three-and-a-half (3.5) times more likely to stop injection drug use altogether. From the CDC's "Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) Fact Sheet," found at <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/syringe-services-programs-factsheet.html>.
2. The United States Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services' (SAMHSA) Buprenorphine Practitioner Locator, <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/practitioner-program-data/treatment-practitioner-locator>.
3. Taken from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/opioid-summaries-by-state/tennessee-opioid-summary>.
4. The chart below shows the increase in drug OD deaths in the U.S. from 1999 to 2017, taken from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>.

National drug OD deaths, 1999-2017



Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Multiple Causes of Death, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/tables/multiple-causes-of-death>

All About Harm Reduction