

Sectors to Engage in a Community Awareness-Building Event on Opioid Misuse and Overdose

Community events to raise a community's awareness around the issue of opioid misuse and overdose can increase the public's knowledge of the problem and mobilize support for prevention and treatment efforts. Prevention practitioners can play a major role in coordinating these events, but success requires representation from numerous sectors. This material describes sectors that you may want to engage when organizing a community event—either as partners in planning the event, or as valuable audience members.

SECTORS TO ENGAGE

- **Elected Officials.** Representation from the governor, mayor, select board members, health-related advisory council members, etc. can increase the magnitude of a community event. Elected officials can help identify opportunities for integrating opioid prevention efforts into other community efforts.
- **Faith-based Organizations.** Leaders from churches, synagogues, mosques, meeting houses—and faith-affiliated community organizations, are deeply committed to supporting individuals in the community. Faith-based organizations can provide meeting space, resources, and publicize the event through their own communications channels (e.g., newsletters).
- **Law Enforcement.** Representatives from local police departments can speak with a voice of authority on the current state of the opioid crisis in the community (for example, the potency and purity of drugs being used) and about existing protections under Good Samaritan laws. Police departments involved with Police-Assisted Addiction Recovery Initiative or Law Enforcement-Assisted Diversion may be especially helpful.
- **Local Government.** Representation from municipal/county health department, county executives or administrators, local heroin/opioid task forces can help make the public aware of what efforts to address opioid misuse and overdose are already underway.
- **Media.** Community awareness-building events often generate interest from the media. Developing media samples prior to the event can help local outlets more easily report on the chosen narrative for the event.
- **Harm Reduction Programs.** Local programs that work with people who use drugs, like syringe exchange programs or HIV prevention programs, may be best suited to talk about the history of naloxone distribution in the community. They can also speak to how the opioid crisis is impacting drug-using communities.

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- **Healthcare.** Local healthcare providers, like federally qualified health centers, Health Care for the Homeless projects, local primary care providers who prescribe buprenorphine, can present the role of providers in preventing opioid misuse and support services for people with opioid use disorders. Their presence can also build the credibility of the event.
- **Parents and Loved Ones of People Who Use Drugs.** Invite parents and loved ones to talk about the impact of loving someone with an opioid use disorder, or losing someone to an overdose. Look to local chapters of national support organizations like Learn to Cope and Families Anonymous, as well as individuals who organize local events for International Overdose Awareness Day.
- **People Who Use Drugs.** Perhaps best suited to speak to the impact of the opioid crisis on the community, a person who uses drugs, or a person in recovery can serve as a spokesperson at your event.