

2023 ACTION PLAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Philadelphia's Overdose Response

April 2023

OPIOID RESPONSE UNIT

Mission and Purpose

Established in February 2020, the Opioid Response Unit (ORU) is a permanent unit within the Managing Director's Office that ensures City departments are operating under a unified strategy in response to the overdose crisis in Philadelphia. The ORU works across departments to expand the prevention and treatment of substance use disorder, while helping impacted communities recover through coordinated efforts in community support and public safety. The ORU also collaborates with residents, providers, and community partners to mobilize a community-based response and support impacted areas.

Learn more at phila.gov/opioids.



Executive Summary

The overdose crisis in Philadelphia is a public health emergency. In 2021, Philadelphia lost 1,276 people to fatal overdose.

Philly's street drug supply is more potent and unpredictable, increasing the risk for overdose. Fentanyl, a highly potent synthetic opioid, has largely replaced heroin and is often mixed with xylazine ("tranq"), an animal tranquilizer not meant for human use. Tranq can cause severe wounds that make it difficult to access SUD treatment, and can suppress breathing, which complicates overdose reversal.

The overdose crisis is not limited to opioids. More than half of fatal overdoses involved the combination of opioids and stimulants. Overdoses involving opioids and stimulants are likely from fentanyl being pressed into counterfeit pills, as well as intentional polysubstance use.

The overdose crisis is citywide. In 2021, the majority of fatal overdoses occurred outside of the Kensington-area, with 69% of fatal overdoses taking place in the victim's home. Sharp increases in unintentional fatal overdoses were seen in North Philadelphia ZIP Codes 19124, 19132, 19133, 19140 and 19144.

Overdoses are increasing among communities of color. Black Philadelphians aged 35-44 died from unintentional overdose more than any other racial/ethnic group in 2021. Encouraging culturally affirming conversations around available options in treatment and harm reduction is crucial for helping individuals access care and combat stigma.

Philadelphians who are at risk for overdose may not identify as substance users and may not recognize themselves in outreach campaigns targeted to people who use drugs. Meeting residents where they are and partnering with trusted community messengers can raise public awareness and make harm reduction more accessible in impacted communities.

The 2023 ORU Action Plan details work across City departments in response to the overdose crisis, focused on advancing four key strategies:



Engaging and supporting impacted communities.



Ensuring public safety by reducing drug-market activity.



Preventing overdoses and reducing harms associated with substance misuse.



Expanding access to behavioral health treatment and recovery services.



Key areas of progress in 2022 include:

- Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) distributed 54,036 doses of naloxone and installed the first Naloxone Near Me Tower in West Philadelphia.
- The Office of Homeless Services (OHS) and the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbilities (DBHIDS) completed a 100 Day Challenge pilot in Kensington and successfully connected 377 people to housing and treatment services.
- DBHIDS piloted the first licensed mobile wound care van in Pennsylvania in response to xylazine and treated 1,254 patients for wounds.
- PDPH expanded bereavement care to support families who have lost loved ones to substance misuse and launched the first Overdose Memorial Garden in Center City.
- ORU launched the Overdose Prevention and Community Healing Fund, a \$3.5M grantmaking program that mobilizes community-based organizations as trusted community messengers to bring prevention resources to impacted communities.
- Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and the Free Library partnered with community providers to provide free, year-long family-friendly programming in Kensington-area parks and coordinated with PPD, PDPH and CLIP to provide ongoing park security and cleaning.
- MDO-Community Services created 4,177 low-barrier temporary employment opportunities through Same Day Work Pay.

While we mark progress made, we also recognize that more work is required to reach impacted communities and turn the tide on the overdose crisis. In 2022, the City of Philadelphia secured its share of the nationwide opioid settlements and will receive about \$200M to support a wide array of crisis response strategies over the next 18 years. In January 2023, the City announced \$20 million in initial investments from the opioid settlement to fund several initiatives that are reflected in the 2023 ORU Action Plan.

In 2023, the City of Philadelphia will:

- **Launch mobile methadone citywide**, making critical treatment for substance use disorder accessible on the street.
- **Support the Kensington Plan** through \$7.5M in strategic investments towards repairing Kensington homes, parks and schools.
- **Disrupt the open-air drug markets** in Kensington through Drug Market Intervention (DMI).
- **Increase the number of permanent and supportive housing opportunities** to support people experiencing homelessness at different stages of recovery.
- **Expand harm reduction services citywide**, ensuring that messaging is culturally affirming and accessible for impacted families and communities, and better understand why people who use drugs are engaging in polysubstance use.



Overview

The City of Philadelphia established the Opioid Response Unit (ORU) in February 2020 to focus on preventing and treating opioid use disorder and helping communities recover, ensuring City departments operate with a unified strategy and shared resources in response to the overdose crisis.

The Opioid Response Unit manages four strategy groups:



COMMUNITY SUPPORT



PREVENTION



PUBLIC SAFETY



TREATMENT




Each strategy group works to advance strategic initiatives that address short and long-term goals in the City’s response to the overdose crisis. The strategic initiatives listed below were designed to be implemented over a period of five years, starting in 2020, with annual Action Items that evolve and respond to current trends:

OPIOID RESPONSE UNIT		
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE	2023 ACTION ITEMS	PARTICIPATING AGENCIES
<p>COMMUNITY SUPPORT</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase Housing First and Permanent Supportive Housing in neighborhoods with high overdose rates. 2. Expand employment programs for youth in neighborhoods with high overdose rates. 3. Develop holistic and trauma-informed healing centered engagement program for communities, individuals, and families impacted by substance use disorder. 4. <i>Coordinate with Public Safety to close drug corners and activate community spaces in neighborhoods with high overdose rates.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Launch Overdose Prevention and Community Healing Fund. → Advance community-driven master planning efforts through strategic investments in Kensington. → Sustain Kensington Community Resilience Fund. → Reduce homelessness experienced by people at different stages of recovery. → Simplify access to existing trauma resources for residents. → Increase outreach to residents for home repair grant programs. → Improve flow from Recovery Housing to Shared Supportive Housing. → Implement citywide community engagement plan. → Scope feasibility for sobering center. → Sustain Kensington Wellness Resource Fair. → Support Drug Market Intervention in East Division. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Commerce Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO) Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS) Free Library of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services (OHS) Department of Licenses & Inspections (L&I) Philadelphia Law Department Mayor’s Commission on Aging Managing Director’s Office – Community Services, Philly 311, CLIP MDO – Health & Human Services Cabinet (MDO-HHS) Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR) Department of Planning & Development Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation (PHDC) Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH)

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	STRATEGIC INITIATIVE	2023 ACTION ITEMS	PARTICIPATING AGENCIES
PREVENTION 	5. Reduce overdoses and increase access to harm reduction services. 6. Scale Emergency Medical Services Alternative Response Units.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Expand harm reduction services and increase citywide naloxone and fentanyl test strips distribution. → Expand Alternative Response Unit-2. → Scope expansion of post non-fatal overdose interventions by EMS. → Move beyond one-size-fits all approach to overdose prevention. → Develop culturally affirming curricula and engagement materials. 	DBHIDS Philadelphia Fire Department MDO-HHS MDO-Office of Criminal Justice (OCJ) Office of Public Engagement Office of Black Male Engagement Office of Re-entry Partnerships Office of Interfaith Affairs Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) Philadelphia Department of Prisons (PDP) PDPH
	PUBLIC SAFETY 	7. Improve coordinated narcotics strategy between local, state and federal agencies. 8. Pursue permanent closure of drug corners and coordinate with Community Support Strategy to activate community spaces in neighborhoods with high overdose rates. 9. Scale Police-Assisted Diversion with co-responders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Disrupt open-air drug markets in Kensington through Drug Market Intervention (DMI) strategy. → Implement Post-Arrest Wellness Supports in East Division. → Expand Police Assisted Diversion. → Ensure safety and security for community parks activation. → Improve public information for Accelerated Misdemeanor Program. → Support SDP Opioid Task Force. → Address quality of life concerns on transit lines and hubs. → Increase enforcement for illegal dumping and Nuisance Business Task Force.
TREATMENT 	10. Expand warm hand-off program, including post-incarceration. 11. Expand mobile Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD). 12. Execute Medication First policies, provider incentives, and expand access to treatment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Launch mobile methadone citywide. → Expand access to Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and increase MOUD dosage in prisons. → Expand mobile wound care. → Scope contingency management model. → Ensure treatment system agility in response to overdose crisis. 	DBHIDS Law MDO-HHS PDP PDPH



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