

New York State Harm Reduction Association: Authorizing Overdose Prevention Centers in New York State.

February 18, 2022

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Authorizing Overdose Prevention Centers in New York State

Dear Governor Hochul:

We are writing you—as a statewide group of Harm Reduction organizations consisting of practitioners, drug treatment providers, current and former drug users, and family members of people who use drugs—to express our deep appreciation for the unprecedented support you have shown to the Harm Reduction movement, as well as to ask your support in authorizing Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs) in New York State.

At its core, Harm Reduction is an act of compassion and love, recognizing the inherent worth and worthiness of every individual. We are grateful for your recent policy decisions, such as syringe decriminalization, Medicaid preauthorization of buprenorphine, signing the “Less is More Act” and increasing access to Naloxone. These policies recognize the capacity of people who use drugs to make positive changes in their lives on their own terms.

In the spirit of love for people who use drugs, we ask that you take another bold step forward by directing the Health Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett to immediately authorize Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs) in New York State. OPCs are an evidence-based intervention that saves lives, connects people who use drugs to supportive care and resources, and reduces the transmission of HIV and viral hepatitis. They provide safe, clean spaces where individuals can more safely inject (or otherwise use) their pre-obtained drugs with sterile equipment, and they are staffed with professionals who are trained to intervene in the case of an overdose.

OPCs have been a successful intervention around the world since the 1980s; however, no such program has been formally authorized yet in the United States. In December 2021, former Mayor Bill De Blasio made the call to allow OPCs to open in New York City. Since then, New York City’s first two OPCs, operated by OnPoint NYC, have reversed 123 overdoses and assisted over 600 individuals in just two months of operation. With the formal authorization of OPCs throughout the state, we can make public health history by allowing local jurisdictions to lend a greater level of support to the success, evaluation, and replication of this intervention.

We appreciate your personal commitment to and public compassion for people who use drugs, as well as those who have survived the overdose death of a loved one. The authorization of OPCs is an act of compassion that will help end the opioid overdose crisis once and for all.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further. Thank you for considering this proposal.

Sincerely,